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**FOREVER
WE DIE!**

by C. H. Thames



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Rhodes faced the agonies of alien torture because he knew the secret which held an entire world in bondage. It was a secret proclaiming—

Forever We Die!

by

C. H. Thames

THE GUARD spat in Phil Rhodes' food bowl, closed the grate, and trudged away down the stone-walled corridor.

Darkness returned to the nar-

row, coffin-shaped cell. Rhodes reached for the bowl of gruel. It was tepid, not hot. The cell was very cold. In the square of light admitted briefly when the grate



had been opened, Rhodes had seen the big, unkempt guard's breath, a puff of smoke on the cold air. He had also seen the guard hack spit-tle into the bowl of gruel.

It was no whim on the guard's part. Rhodes grinned wryly, and realized he was doing so, and encouraged his facial muscles in the act. Nothing around here was a whim. Absolutely nothing. It was all part of a plan, and the purpose of the plan was to break Rhodes.

Given: one Earthman.

Problem: to degrade him by subtle psychological torture.

Purpose: a big, fat question mark which, by itself, was almost enough to drive Rhodes crazy.

He ate the gruel. He held his breath and got it down somehow, got it down because he had to.

It had been some time since the last question period, and Rhodes expected to be summoned momentarily. Why me? he thought for the hundredth time. That was part of it, too. Why Rhodes? He was only a student at the Earth University at Deneb III, here on Kedak now - - that was Deneb IV - - to do field work in extra-terrestrial anthropology. And the Kedaki had come for him, one night, how long ago? Rhodes had no idea how long it was, and that was part of the plan too. His sleep was irregular, usually dis-

turbed by one or another of the guards as part of the overall pattern of psychological torture.

Rhodes began to shiver. It was growing suddenly cold. Naturally, that was no accident. The cell was very small and so shaped that Rhodes could neither recline fully nor stand up without jack-knifing his spine. Obviously, he couldn't engage in much physical activity to keep warm. The Kedaki knew this: it was part of the maddening plan.

Rhodes shook with cold, felt the skin of his face going numb, heard his teeth chattering. The abrupt cold now was his entire universe. He made an effort of will - - you're warm, he told himself, you're warm. His lips took on that peculiar numb puckering sensation which meant, he knew, that they were blue with cold. He felt a welcome lethargy, then, as if the terrible cold were a bed of repose, the most comfortable, most wonderful bed he'd ever had. He wanted to sink back in it, surrender to it.

If he did, if he surrendered to the blood-freezing cold, he would die.

No, he told himself. That was wrong. They wanted him to think he would die. But it was out of the question. If they'd wanted to kill him, there were easier ways.

What they wanted was a state of mind. They wanted terror, a simple animal fear of death.

You're not going to die, Rhodes told himself. They need you - - for something. They're very good at making you think so, but you're not going to die.

A sudden blast of hot air belched into the freezing cell.

It was Turkish-bath hot, and it dissipated the cold at once. It was stifling. Rhodes, who was sitting awkwardly because the cell was constructed for minimum comfort, opened his mouth and gulped in the hot, wet air. His lungs needed more oxygen; his head was giddy with the need; his pulses throbbed.

He sank into a troubled sleep, shoulders propped against rough stone. He slept for half an hour while the unseen vents in the cell poured heat on him.

There was a grating sound, and footsteps. Something hard prodded Rhodes' back. He opened his eyes. The heavy boot struck again, thudding against his kidney. He rolled away from it.

"Crawl out of there," the guard said in Kedaki.

Rhodes, who was a student of the Kedaki civilization, understood the language perfectly. But even if he had not, the tone of voice was unmistakable. Rhodes crawled to-

ward the grating on his hands and knees. The roof of the cell was so low, he could barely crawl. It was more a slithering motion. Part of the treatment, Rhodes told himself, able to bear it better because he understood. Part of the process of degradation. Turn a man into an animal, and he'll do whatever you wish.

"More questions?" Rhodes asked in Kedaki when he stood up outside the cell, stretching the cramped muscles of his back, shoulders and legs.

"What do you think?" the guard replied, and prodded him forward down the brightly lit corridor.

THE ROOM was very clean.

It was spotless, possibly antiseptically clean. That, too, was part of the plan. For Rhodes' cell was filthy. Rhodes' clothing was stiff with his own foul sweat. Rhodes' skin itched with encrusted dirt.

"Sit down," the Kedaki said politely.

Rhodes sighed. This was the polite one. He had two interrogators, one cruel, brutal, harsh, the other as polite and suave as the rustle of silk. To keep Rhodes guessing . . .

He sat down across a metal desk from the interrogator. The man was, Rhodes judged, in his

thirties. He had the faintly purple skin of the Kedaki - - not really purple, but as purple as the skin of an American Indian is red. He was slightly built, smooth-skinned, almost beardless. His eyes were very friendly but somehow very deadly.

"You have been here three months," he said conversationally.

"Three months! Yesterday, they told me"

"Yesterday? Indeed? And how do you know it was yesterday?"

"Well, I thought"

"You see, you have no way of knowing."

"But three months! You haven't even told me why I'm a prisoner. If I could just make a call," Rhodes said, his voice rising to an almost hysterical whine although he attempted to keep it level. "Just one call to the Earth Consul"

"Mr. Rhodes," the interrogator said softly. "You are a student, merely a student. I do not say this deprecatingly, but merely to point out that you are not a servant of your government and as such shouldn't undergo torture because you consider it the, ah, patriotic thing to do. How old are you, Rhodes?"

"I'm twenty-one," Rhodes said.

"A very young man, but stubborn."

"Listen!" Rhodes cried, his voice rising out of control again. "I don't even know what you want to know! Every day you change your questions! And every day you change how you react to my answers. I don't know what you want! I think you're crazy, all of you!"

"Do you really think so?"

"No," Rhodes admitted in a subdued voice.

"I will tell you something, Rhodes. We Kedaki are experts at psychological torture. You know that, don't you, as a student of our culture? Yes? -- good. Eventually, we get what we want. Since no Kedaki fears death because he knows he will be reincarnated - -"

"You say."

"No Kedaki doubts this fact. Other creatures are not reincarnated, but the Kedaki are. As a consequence, the Kedaki are fearless. The fear of death does not exist for us and therefore, the fear of pain and violence is also minimized. The Kedaki, as you know, make wonderful soldiers. I tell you all this only to prove that we are the galaxy's most adept practitioners of psychological torture, as a necessity. I tell you all this only to save you further trouble."

"But I still don't know what

you want."

"Nor will you, ever. Even when we are finished with you. I'll tell you, Rhodes. We want the answer to one question. We are asking you hundreds. When we break you completely, when you answer every question the way we want it to be answered, you will answer the one important question. Are you ready?"

"No," said Rhodes.

"What do you mean, no?"

"Because I can never tell in advance whether you want the truth or lies. Because either way I give myself a hard time. Look: just ask me the one question. Maybe I won't mind answering it."

"You'll mind. Besides, when we're all finished here, we don't want you to know. What kind of work do you do, Rhodes?"

"You know what kind. I already told you, fifty times."

"What kind of work do you do, Rhodes?"

"I'm a student of extra-terrestrial anthropology at Deneb University, doing field work here on Kedak"

"Good."

Good, thought Rhodes. They're accepting the truth today, not rejecting it. He settled back in his chair and answered the unimportant initial questions almost automatically. His family back on

Earth. Mother, father, younger sister. What he thought of Deneb III and the university there. Why he wanted to be an extra-terrestrial anthropologist. Exactly what kind of field work he was doing on Kedak.

"Reincarnation," Rhodes said.

"At least, a planet-wide belief in reincarnation. It's unique in the galaxy, as far as we know, and it sets the pattern for Kedaki civilization."

"You are making a planet-wide study?"

Rhodes shook his head. He'd been asked these questions many times before, but it was the subject he loved and he felt himself warming to it. "Not a planet-wide study," he said. "Just this city. Just Junction City. But if you can learn how a sweeping social institution controls one center of population, then"

"I'm sure," the interrogator said dryly.

"Besides, there are the ruins outside the city."

"Indeed, there are the ruins."

"Because an anthropologist is interested in the history of his subject as well as its merely ephemeral present. And there are those who believe that the Balata 'kai ruins hold the origin of your belief in metempsychosis"

"Do you, Rhodes?"

"Yes. Yes, I do."

"Have you found anything to fortify this belief?"

"I have."

"What have you found?"

"The Balata 'kai *Book of the Dead*. Oh, it isn't a book, really. It's some tablets - - five thousand years old."

"You have seen these tablets?"

"Yes," said Rhodes.

"Where?"

"The Temple of the Golden Dome, Balata 'kai."

"They are there now?"

"No," said Rhodes. "I took them."

"You took them where?"

"Well, I hid them."

"Where?"

Rhodes grinned. "I'm not going to answer that," he said. He was thinking. Prolong the interview, Phil old boy. Because it's clean here, and neither too warm nor too cold; and you can sit comfortably or stand if you want to.

"Why aren't you going to answer it?"

Rhodes grinned again. "I realize this isn't very important to you . . ."

"Everything is important to me while I do my job."

"But it's very important to me, I was going to say. Because *The Book of the Dead* is an anthropological find, that's why. Because

I intend to have an exclusive on it until I've finished my work here."

"What makes you think *The Book of the Dead* isn't very important to us?"

"Don't tell me," Rhodes said incredulously, "that I'm in jail and being tortured because I won't tell you where I've hid an anthropological curiosity which may not even be genuine!"

"No, I won't tell you. Now, as to the genuineness of *The Book of the Dead* . . ."

RHODES FELT suddenly sleepy. He'd been awakened to come here. He was always awakened to come here, sometimes after what he thought was a full night's sleep and sometimes after what seemed only a few moments. He listened sleepily as the interrogator went on, surprisingly doing most of the talking. He hardly heard the words, had all he could do to keep his head from slumping down on the desk. It just wasn't very important. It was preliminary to what really mattered, to the questions about Earth history, sociology, engineering, economy, which always followed.

But why me? Rhodes thought. My subject is extra-terrestrial anthropology . . .

" . . . therefore, Rhodes," the interrogator was saying, "*The*

Book of the Dead is not only the oldest known written document on Kedak, but also, clearly, genuine. Do you agree?"

Rhodes stood up and paced back and forth. The interrogator permitted this, even encouraged it. There was neither room to stand nor to pace in Rhodes' cell, a fact which made it difficult for Rhodes to do anything but cooperate completely with his interrogator. Well, why shouldn't I cooperate? he thought. If I cooperate, they'll let me out of here. Let me out of here? No, how can they do that? They're holding an extra-Kedakian illegally, and they know it, and I know it, and they know I know it. My God, Rhodes thought suddenly, are they going to kill me when they're finished with me? It seemed the only logical outcome of all this.

"... population growth of the Earth colony on the planet Mars?"

Rhodes supplied the answer, knowing it was one you could find in any textbook on the Martian colony back in the solar system. All this, he thought, for what? Because Kedak is resisting its incorporation into the Galactic League? Because the Kedaki rulers want to be left alone, fearing that their doctrine of reincarnation will be discredited by intercourse with other worlds?

But the one maddening question remained: why Rhodes?

"... titanium deposits on the moons of Jupiter?"

"Sorry," Rhodes said, "I don't know the answer to that one."

At that moment, the room shook.

Trained since his imprisonment to expect the unexpected, Rhodes thought it was part of the treatment. But the interrogator seemed surprised.

There was a deep rumbling which seemed to rise up from the very bowels of the planet. The room shook again. Rhodes felt himself flung violently across it, colliding with the far wall. The interrogator's head slammed against the metal desk, then the interrogator stood up, blood on his face.

"Guard!" he cried. "Take this man back to his cell at once!"

The room shook a third time, plaster sifted down from the ceiling, and a big crack appeared over Rhodes' head. Through it he saw daylight - - the first daylight he'd seen in three months, if he could believe the interrogator.

"Guard!" screamed the interrogator, his composure gone.

Kedak was, Rhodes knew, an earthquake-prone planet. All young worlds were, and Kedak was a young world. Was this, then, an earthquake?

The room swayed, tilted. Rhodes

staggered uphill back to the desk, clutching its edge for support. Underfoot, there was a rolling, booming sound. You could not merely hear it, you could feel it. It rolled on from a long way off, coming closer every second, like the distant boom of a thousand cannon fired at split-second intervals.

The door opened, and the guard stood there. The interrogator pointed at Rhodes, shouting something which was swallowed completely by the rolling, booming sound. The guard shouted something, back, unheard in the noise, then walked toward Rhodes.

He never reached the Earthman.

The room rocked. The floor came up suddenly, jarringly, and the ceiling came down.

The guard stood there, a look of horror on his face. Not fear of death, Rhodes found himself thinking in the final few seconds. The Kedaki, believing in metempsychosis, did not fear death. But the choking, blinding fear of any man a split-second before personal catastrophe.

Then, literally, the ceiling fell.

The guard pivoted slowly, as if he had all the time in the world to return to the door. He took one small step and the ceiling hit him. It came down not in one sheet but sectionally, Rhodes

found himself thinking with amazing objectivity, because - - see? - - the guard is being struck now, but I haven't been touched

The guard fell, and the ceiling crumpled on top of him. Rhodes saw the guard's head, very close to the floor, bent at right angles to his body, which was stretched out and hidden by the shards of plaster and stone. There was a worm of blood trickling from the guard's nose. His eyes were opened wide, but the eyeballs had rolled up in the sockets.

The interrogator screamed, and Rhodes heard the sound faintly above the thunderous booming before the tons of plaster and stone came down on both of them.

CHAPTER II

HE STOOD UP.

I'm dead, he thought. How can I be standing, if I'm dead?

It was dim, but not completely dark. He breathed deeply, and gagged on plaster dust. He heard a siren distantly, and the brisk, businesslike sound of flames crackling nearby.

A pile of masonry covered the broken, battered desk. Automatically, he groped behind it. There was someone there. They had been talking, he remembered.

He found the man, a Kedaki.

Am I a Kedaki? he thought. He did not know. He remembered nothing about himself.

Shock, he thought reasonably enough. You've been through hell, so just calm down and it will all come back to you. The man behind the desk was dead, his skull flattened on top and pulpy. The man nearer to the door was also dead, his neck broken. He went around the corpse and to the door, which opened into the room. He opened it, was driven back by a wall of flame.

He slammed the door, but not before his eyebrows were seared. He went quickly to the center of the room and smelled something like feathers burning before he felt the pain. Then, instinctively, he beat his hands against his head. His hair had caught fire. He shouted with pain and looked up and saw the smoke and the fluctuating brightness of the flame and by the time he got it out he knew all his hair was gone. He felt his scalp gingerly. It smarted, but there didn't seem to be any blisters. Third degree burn - - he was lucky. Only for the moment, he realized. Because the fire was still out there and while the door seemed flame resistant, it wouldn't resist forever.

He had to find some other way out of here if he didn't want to

perish in the flames.

He made a swift circuit of the room. There was no other door. There were no windows. He was engulfed momentarily by panic, but could still think objectively. See? he told himself. You're afraid. Afraid to die. So you know at least this much: you're not a Kedaki, whatever else you are. For the Kedaki wouldn't fear death, that was sure.

Returning to the door, he opened it a crack. The flames were dazzling, roaring, dancing things. He shut the door and felt its surface. It was uncomfortably hot to the touch. He waited a few moments, listening to the sounds of the flame and the still-wailing siren. Then he touched the door again. Unmistakably, it had grown hotter. He stood at the door and shouted for help, then laughed. Nobody would hear him. And certainly, nobody could come through the fire to rescue him.

He made a prowling circuit of the room once more. Nothing.

Then something stirred overhead. He looked up, and the laughter bubbled in his throat, almost hysterically.

Beams and masonry and sky.

The ceiling had come down. Or, most of it had. There was a way out and he'd not looked for it, not found it at first, because he

hadn't expected to find it over his head.

He jumped, came down again. What's the matter with me? he thought. It's way over my head. I'm acting crazy.

He looked at the door. It was glowing a dull red now. There was a dry burning sound. A flame licked through the door tentatively. Got to hurry, he thought.

The pile of masonry covering the desk seemed tall enough. He climbed it, stood there, reached up with his hands. Short, by several feet. He looked at the door: hungry flames were devouring it. He crouched, tensing his muscles, then jumped. But the loose-piled masonry offered no purchase and was dislodged by his feet. The result was that his groping fingers did not even come close to the beams overhead.

A second time he tried it, and this time the rubble underfoot shifted and he was flung to the floor. This won't do, he told himself. This won't do at all. If you don't get out of here, and get out of here fast, you're going to be roasted.

Now the distant siren's wail had come closer. Something rumbled outside, and the next moment he was deluged with water. By this time the flames were eating their way along the wall on either side

of the door. They leaped to the rubble on the floor, found something combustible there, and burned. He began to choke on the smoke and the steam as water hissed and boiled on the masonry.

They'd put the fire out, all right, he thought. Eventually, they'd get it under control. But if I'm not broiled by the flames I'm going to be boiled in their fire-fighting water, so what difference does it make?

He tried the desk again, but could not jump high enough. He stood there, panting with the effort to get enough oxygen into his lungs. The flames danced playfully around him. The fact that there was so much in the room that could burn surprised him.

Once more he jumped. He hardly had the strength to clear the floor with his feet. His left ankle was numb and when he came down he knew he would not be able to jump again.

That was it. He'd burn.

A CRAFTY look suddenly came into his eyes. You're hysterical, he thought, and was right. But it didn't matter. He got down on hands and knees, then on his belly. Cooler near the floor, he told himself, still smiling craftily. You're outfoxing the fire, old boy. You crafty devil. Close to the

floor, he could breathe. But it was hot, and the flames circled him, expectantly, it seemed, as if they had burned through the entire prison just for a chance to get at him.

Tentatively, a tongue of flame licked at his arm. He brushed it away as you would brush an insect away. It came back, playfully. It hardly seemed to hurt but he screamed anyway.

When the fire was finally brought under control, they found him. His skin was red and blistered where it was not black and crisp. His prison uniform had been consumed completely by the flames, as had all his body hair. Miraculously, he was still alive. It was a slow, irregular heartbeat and they did not expect it to last long, but dutifully they took him to the aid station.

He was lucky there.

Among the doctors on duty to treat the thousands of victims of the Junction City earthquake was an Arcturan named Quotis. Now Quotis, unlike the Kedaki, had a high regard for human life. For Quotis did not believe in reincarnation since Quotis was not a Kedaki. The other doctors looked at the burned thing which had been a man and shook their heads and one of them said, "It doesn't matter, my friend," patting Quotis

on the back and winking at the others. But Quotis, shrugging, replied, "The man is still alive and if he is alive it's my job to keep him alive." The Kedaki physician pointed out that there were bones to set elsewhere, and states of shock to be treated, and lacerations to mend, but Quotis would not hear of it.

The case intrigued him. The man should have been dead, but was still living. Besides, he was a Kedaki, wasn't he? And the Kedakis held death in very little regard. Therefore, Dr. Quotis told himself happily, he would be able to practice his new theories of skin rebirth on the injured Kedaki. But he had to hurry because a loss of half the epidermis was usually fatal, and this Kedaki had lost all of it to either first or second degree burns. Why, you couldn't even see the faintly purple tint of the skin anywhere

If he died in the treatment? Quotis shrugged. No approved of treatment could save him. Still, on most civilized planets the answer would have been no. But on Kedaki? On Kedaki it was different. Smiling and eager, Quotis gave the order that took the dying man to a hospital near the aid station. Of native Kedaki hospitals, of course, there were none. Firm believers in metempsychosis,

the Kedaki did not waste time and effort keeping moribund people alive. The injured, yes: but the injured could be treated, as the situation demanded, at aid stations like the one set up after the Junction City earthquake.

The hospital which Dr. Quotis took his patient to was the Arcturan hospital in Junction City, an institution made necessary by the fact that many Arcturan nationals lived on Kedak, particularly in Junction City, which was not only a native but an interplanetary trading center.

While the patient was made ready, Quotis thought: You cannot graft skin on a man with no skin left. For the only effective graft is that of a man's own epidermis - - or that of his identical twin, should one exist.

Then why couldn't you supply brand new skin tissue? thought the Arcturan happily, utterly involved in his scientific detachment. Impermanent, of course. But that didn't matter. It would keep the patient alive and would stimulate the growth of new skin before it sloughed off. Say, a month. One Kedakin month. The new skin would be identical with the artificial skin and not with the patient's former epidermis, but that didn't matter. Too bad I don't even have a picture to go by, though,

the Arcturan thought! Perhaps there is a mole or some other blemish which, foolishly, he would want reproduced. Well, no matter. At least the faint purple pigmentation of the Kedaki is easy to make, yes, very easy. Now an Arcturan with his vivid orange skin would be something else again, Quotis admitted, or an Earthman with the subtle gradations of pale tan. But those could come later. It would be enough, for now, to save this one life with the revolutionary development in skin regrowth.

"Patient is ready, doctor," the orange Arcturan nurse said.

"Still alive?"

"For the moment, yes."

"You give him"

"Only a few minutes, I'm afraid."

"Then we must hurry," said Quotis, and rushed into the operating room.

CHAPTER III

"**H**OW DO you feel?" Quotis asked.

"Still stiff," said the patient.

"But otherwise?"

"Otherwise fine. They told me how you saved my life, doctor," the patient said in Arcturan.

"I'm still surprised how well you speak my language."

"I seem to have a gift for tongues. I can speak Earthian, Arcturan, Sirian, Fomalhautian, and naturally, my own Kedaki. All of them with just about no accent, all of them equally well."

"We'll be taking the bandages off today. You still don't have any hair, but that ought to grow back later. You're alive, and that's what counts. Can you believe that every square inch of your skin surface was gone when they found you last month?"

"That's what the nurses keep telling me. Do you think that after the bandages are removed, doctor, they might find out about me?"

"We were hoping your memory would come back of its own accord. Otherwise," Quotis shrugged, "there are other ways. As you can imagine, thousands of your fellow Kedaki are still missing, after the quake. Most of them probably will never be found, so there ought to be thousands of people through here to look at you - - when you're well enough. Never fear, one of them will know you."

"But the prison office? Doesn't it mean something that I was found in the prison office?"

"It might, but the prison authorities report that all their men are accounted for, safe, killed, injured - - none missing. Why, do you remember working in the

prison?"

"No," said Rhodes, "I don't remember anything."

"Relax! Please, relax. Someone will know you. Someone will be able to trigger that memory of yours. Relax, if you will"

"There were no marks of identification on me?"

"No, none. Your clothing was burned off. You were naked as well as completely skinned," said Quotis, beaming. "Remarkable cure. Remarkable. On Arcturus, when I return, I will astound the medical profession. Here on Kedaki, unfortunately, there is no such organized profession. Well, now, about your new skin"

"What about fingerprints?" Rhodes persisted. "My identity may not be important to you, doctor. But it's important to me."

"I understand, I understand. I didn't mean to be so callous. But consider. You have no fingerprints. It will be a while before the whorls re-establish themselves on your new skin. Immediately after the operation, before you were bandaged, we took your retinal pattern, but there was no record of it in the Junction City Identity Center or with the local police. There is absolutely no way you can be identified, except through your own memory or the efforts of your Kedaki friends and relatives to

find you. In time, I'm sure everything will straighten out. Meanwhile," said Quotis, smiling, "if you're ready, we can remove the bandages from your face. Tomorrow, from the rest of your body. If there are any imperfections, don't worry. Eventually, the artificial skin we have given you shall become your old skin again. I mean that literally. For example, if we have left out - - through ignorance - - a birthmark or a mole, it will reappear again after six or seven months have passed. Your fingerprints will also, as I have indicated, re-establish themselves. If we have made your pigmentation too light or too dark, your true color will also appear after some months Well, then, are you ready? Ready for that first look at yourself? It might help, you know. It might trigger something!" cried Quotis enthusiastically.

"Even while he was speaking, he had begun to remove the bandages from Rhodes' face. "The room will be dark," he said. "Gradually, we will increase the light. Your eyes have been in darkness for a long time."

"My eyes" said Rhodes in sudden fear.

"You are worrying about them? You needn't. They were examined when the retinal pattern was

taken. Miraculously, as miraculously as the fact that you are alive, your eyes are all right. Now, then, here we are! See - - ummm, no you cannot see yet. It is dark. There, a little more light. A little more. The eyes, they are all right?"

"It seems awfully bright."

"Any light would, at first. There, a little more. But you are young! Hardly more than a boy, I should judge. The purple of your skin - - yes, the purple looks fine Not a mark, not a trace. My boy, you will not even be scarred."

His face still felt stiff, but very cool. The contact with air was very welcome and the soft stirring of the currents of air as the doctor's hands did some final adjustments on the bandages which still covered him from the neck down, tucking them back into place.

The first thing he saw was the doctor, a small bespectacled man with the vividly orange skin of a full-blooded Arcturan. The doctor was all smiles, and understandably. Then he saw a mirror. It was held before his face and he was aware of the doctor's slight intake of breath as he waited for a reaction, hoping some forgotten memory might be triggered.

He looked in the mirror. "I - - I'm purple!" he gawked.

The doctor frowned. "Of course,

purple. The Kedaki color."

"I'm sorry. I don't know why it startled me."

"Well, I can tell you. I am an Arcturan. This is an Arcturan hospital, and we have been speaking Arcturan. Even if you had been unable to see until today, you associated everything about this place with Arcturus. Probably," and Dr. Quotis laughed, "you were expecting orange skin."

"Probably," said Rhodes, and laughed with him.

"Well, enough excitement for one day. If you are strong enough, tomorrow we can have the first of your visitors, people trying to identify you. I warn you, there will be hundreds, thousands."

"Any time you say," Rhodes replied eagerly. But behind the eagerness was a certain vague confusion. Why had the purple tints of his new skin stirred him so strangely? Purple. Kedaki skin color. What else did he expect?

THE DIRECTOR of the Five Bureau, the Kedaki Secret Police, said, "Stop acting like a fool, please."

"But sir," wailed the prison warden. "I tell you, the Earthman's body was not uncovered in what remained of the prison."

"What does that mean?" the Director demanded scornfully. "I

have here the final earthquake casualty report for Junction City - - shall I read it to you? There are over six thousand people still missing, my dear warden. Six thousand."

"Yes, I know," persisted the prison official. "But doesn't it seem strange that of all the inmates and guards at the prison, the Earth archaeologist alone is missing?"

"Nevertheless, we can assume that virtually all of those missing are dead, buried forever under the debris of the municipal disaster."

"Still, you know how important this Earthman is, what trouble he can cause"

"I know," snapped the Director arrogantly, "But do you?"

"Well, I have been told"

"Told! Told what you had to know, told to furnish the Earthman with a maximum security cell, and so forth. You know nothing!"

"I still"

With a wave of his hand, the Director dismissed the warden. Then, sitting alone at his desk, he lit a cigarette. It was an Earth-cigarette, and a good one. These things, the Director mused, we accept from the outworlders. Their little luxuries. But their way of life, he told himself, never. Whatever threatens our way of life, we

seek out and destroy. He leaned on a corner of the desk's surface and in a moment a serving girl came obsequiously into the room with a tray. Patting her rump playfully, as you might stroke the head of a dog, the Director selected the bottle he wanted from the tray, indicating that she should make him a drink. He waited, watching her graceful movements as she set down the tray and poured the liquid into a delicate glass of Regan crystal. The drink, heady and delicious, was Aldeberanean fire wine. He savored it slowly, then with a gesture indicated that the girl, who wore nothing but a kirtle to cover the nakedness of her loins, should depart. He leaned back and thought: This too - - not the wine, but the woman.

Because the woman would be impossible if the Kedaki way of life were changed. A system, he went on thinking, founded on bed-rock as strong as the pull between the planets.

Metempsychosis

Do you believe in reincarnation? he asked himself. He chuckled, the sound deep in his throat. He was no fool and did not hold a fool's belief. But the others? The servant classes, the slaves? Yes, they believed. All their lives, they were indoctrinated to believe. Reincarnation was the stuff of which their

dreams were fashioned, and so it was that they accepted the hard lot of lifelong servitude with the hope that in their next birth, had they led a good, loyal life, they would be born to a higher station.

Change that? thought the Director. He shook his head slowly, grimly. But the Earthman Rhodes had been a problem, for in the age-old ruins of Balata 'kai he'd stumbled on the manuscript of *The Book of the Dead*, a five thousand year old document which had first propounded the beliefs of metempsychosis. *The Book of the Dead* was a dangerous document, a document which could ignite Kedak in revolutionary conflagration, for it showed clearly that the so-called gods of the earliest Kedaki civilization were not gods at all and their so-called revelation of metempsychosis not a revelation at all but a clever trick calculated to win them a life of ease at the expense of gullible subjects.

What am I thinking? the Director asked himself. The Earthman Rhodes is dead, of course. He couldn't possibly be alive. I'm as bad as the warden, but the warden is a fool who knows nothing Still, even if the warden is a fool and Rhodes is dead, *The Book of the Dead* is still missing. And if there is one chance in a

million that Rhodes lives, then every stone on this planet must be turned to find him

CHAPTER IV

“TIRED, my young friend?” Dr. Quotis asked.

“Disappointed, I guess,” Rhodes admitted.

“I know how you feel. For three days people have been coming here to see you with the hope that you might be a missing relative. But - - ”

“But none of them knew me,” Rhodes finished bleakly. “And yesterday they were only a trickle.”

“All it will take is one.”

“Doctor, I don’t have to tell you I owe my life to you, but - - well, I’m restless.”

“You’re young,” Quotis said with a smile.

“I’ve got to get out and find the lost threads of my life. I’m well enough, you said so yesterday.”

“But a man in your condition - - ”

“Amnesia? So what? I’m perfectly able to take care of myself. It isn’t as if I’m on an alien world or something. Kedak is my home. Kedak is - - ”

“Do you believe in reincarnation?” Quotis asked abruptly.

For a while Rhodes did not

answer. And, when finally he did, it was with a question of his own. “Why do you ask that?”

“Because it might answer at least one question for you: whether you are of high or low birth. If of low, then ”

Rhodes said with a smile, “Since I haven’t jumped on your back and started gouging out your eyes, I guess I wasn’t Kedaki base-born.”

“You high-born Kedaki certainly make no attempt to hide your irreverency!”

“Well, why should they?” said Rhodes. “After all, the system is clearly one which ”

“They? Did you say they?”

“I guess I did.”

“Doesn’t that strike you as rather odd?”

Rhodes shrugged, then said, “Look, I’m all confused. I just want to get out of here and find my life and pick it up where I left off.”

“But you know nothing of your past. Where will you go?”

“I might as well start at the prison. That’s where they found me, isn’t it?”

Quotis shook his head firmly, and his usually mild voice took on surprising strength. “Don’t be a fool, man!” he cried. “We’ve already checked with the prison. None of their personnel is missing.

However, I don't know if they'd checked the inmates at that time. Don't you see?"

"You mean, if I belong at the prison at all, it's as a prisoner?"

"Exactly."

"Still, if I'm to find out anything about myself . . . maybe some discreet inquiries - -"

"Which should never be made by you, my young friend, at least not in person. If you remain on here and allow me to look into the matter for you, I'd consider it part of the treatment."

Rhodes shook his head, saying, "I appreciate that, doctor. I appreciate all you've done for me. But from now on, I start paying my own way."

Quotis squinted at him. "Paying your own way? That's an idiom, isn't it? Surely not Arcturan, as it translates so poorly into the Arcturan language. Kedaki?"

"I don't know," Rhodes admitted.

"Well, I doubt if it is Kedaki. The Kedaki language is not the galaxy's most imaginary. It has fewer idiomatic phrases than any. Could I have . . . no! No, forget it."

"What were you going to say?"

"There's no sense confusing you further when Lord knows you're confused enough."

"But you've got to tell me - if it's something which might help me learn my identity. Don't you see that, doctor?"

"I was thinking . . . well, is it possible - - just barely possible mind you - - that you are not a Kedaki?"

"Not a Kedaki? But my skin! My skin is purple!"

"Because I made it purple. That's no answer. If you're determined to leave here, you ought to at least know that much. You know absolutely nothing about yourself. You could be mistaken in everything you think. For example, you probably are a Kedaki - - but you consider yourself a highborn Kedaki when you might well be low-born. It makes sense, doesn't it? All your life, as a low-born Kedaki, you've been waiting for death and rebirth, hoping you'd get your chance at a higher station in life. Now, after near-death, your subconscious mind is unwilling to accept a return to your lowborn status, so you no longer believe in reincarnation and hence trick yourself into thinking you're highborn. It could explain the amnesia, too."

Rhodes shook his head. "That's a neat theory, except, if true, I wouldn't understand a word you're saying. In the first place, I probably wouldn't know any extra-

Kedakian language. In the second, I wouldn't hear such irreverent talk, without going berserk. In the third, I wouldn't understand terms like sub-conscious mind and even metempsychosis." Rhodes grinned. "But anyhow, you've given me an idea."

"What's that?"

"I'll need a name for myself. In a way I died and was born again, as happens to all good Kedaki. So, how about Matlin?"

"Matlin? That means The Reborn, doesn't it?"

"The Reborn," Rhodes said, nodding. "Well, doc, The Reborn is going to get dressed and out of here. And thanks for everything."

"Will I be able to contact you anywhere, if I learn something?"

"I'll contact you, after I get settled."

An hour later, Rhodes signed the Arcturan hospital release form. He signed the form with his new name, Matlin.

THE DEAN of the Department of Archaeology of the Junction City branch of Kedaki College entered the hospital twenty minutes after Matlin had walked out into the dazzling Denebian sunshine. The Dean, whose name was Gawroi, hardly seemed the academic type. For Gawroi was a strapping baseborn Kedaki who had done the

near impossible: Gawroi had risen in life to a position of some importance among his people. He was a big fellow with enormous shoulders and an appetite for life second only to his appetite for eating. But Gawroi, for all his hedonism, was not soft. He was a hard, capable man - - who passionately believed in the Kedaki doctrine of reincarnation.

That Five Bureau Director, he thought with admiration. Smart. He was smart, all right. He's finally got a lead on this Earthman, Rhodes. But he doesn't send a Five Bureau Operative. Why should he? An extra-Kedakian like the plastic surgeon Quotis of Arcturus would be suspicious of a Five Bureau Operative, wouldn't he? The Kedaki Secret Police - - of course he would be suspicious. But of a fellow scientist, an archaeologist? Never!

Gawroi grinned in admiration, then waited until the grin vanished, waited until his big, earnest face assumed its most earnest look, and entered Quotis' office. Quotis, he observed, was a small bespectacled Arcturan with vivid orange skin. Quotis rushed around his desk, beaming, to pump Gawroi's right hand in the Earth gesture which had swept the galaxy.

"Gawroi!" he exclaimed. "I've heard of you. This is a pleasure, a

real pleasure."

Gawroi sat down, settling down and trying to mask his impatience while Quotis talked of various discoveries in Kedaki archaeology. Quotis was a garrulous fellow, he thought. Perhaps all Arcturans were garrulous; he did not know much about Arcturans: he hardly had had any desire to study the extra-Kedaki people, any of them.

"But, to your business," Quotis finally said. "I apologize, my friend. You should have stopped me. I'm sure you didn't come here to hear an old man talk."

Gawroi assured him it had been a great pleasure listening, then said, "There was an Earthman co-worker of mine at the College, a bright young fellow named Rhodes - - you've heard of him?"

"No. Should I have?"

"Mr. Rhodes has been missing since the earthquake, Dr. Quotis. He had been assigned to the College by his home office in order to make a study of extra-terrestrial penal conditions, in this case, the penal conditions here on Kedak, in Junction City. He was at the prison at the time of the quake, and since every other person there has been accounted for, living or dead, and Rhodes has not"

"Why come to me?"

"Because the Five Bureau tells us that a badly burned man was

brought here, was treated by you. Tell me, doctor, was he an Earthman? Did he survive? Is he here now?"

"If he survived," said Quotis slowly, "wouldn't he have got in touch with you?"

Gawroi said, "We thought an injury, a blow on the head"

"The man I treated was a Kedaki."

"Yes?"

"Yes."

"You speak in the past tense," Gawroi said. The words came automatically. He was thinking: you fool, Gawroi. That was a mistake. A bad mistake. Naturally, if Rhodes was your friend Rhodes would have contacted you after his accident. How can you think it was amnesia, when total amnesia is such a rare thing? See? See the Arcturan doctor? He's suspicious now. Does that mean the man *was* an Earthman?

"I treated him," Quotis said. "He's gone now."

"Treatment successful, doctor? But that is wonderful. I heard the man was severely burned. Do you have his picture?"

"No," said Quotis promptly.

"Could you have been mistaken?"

"About what?"

"About this man's planetality? Tell me, doctor, could he have

been an Earthman?"

"His skin was burned completely. His memory was gone. He might have been anything," Quotis admitted reluctantly.

GAWROI thought: that was a break. The man actually did have amnesia. He said, "There, you see? It was as I thought. But tell me, doctor: he suffered from amnesia, and you let him go?"

"He was an adult. It was his decision to make. I didn't approve of it."

"You have a clinical description of the man?"

"Of course."

"Can you forward it to my office?"

"I'll do that. If it's possible for you to tell me why this Earthman is so important to you . . . ?"

"Why? Why is Phillip Rhodes important?" boomed Gawroi. "Because he was my friend, Dr. Quotis! I want to find my friend! Is that strange?"

"No," Quotis admitted.

"Well, did Rhodes leave a forwarding address?"

"He did not. He may contact me. I rather think he will."

"Splendid, doctor. Splendid. When he does, assuming there is some possibility that this is the same man, will you tell him to contact me at once. With my help

he will be able to take up the thread of his former existence," Gawroi finished enthusiastically. But he was thinking: in a Five Bureau torture cell, where he belongs, this extra-Kedaki, this alien who has dared to counterfeit his own criminally inaccurate version of the *Book of the Dead*.

"I'll let you know," Quotis said. "If you happen to have a picture of this Earthman Rhodes, I may be able to offer an opinion now."

Gawroi nodded. "I can oblige you with that." He rummaged in a pocket of his tunic with big, capable hands. He handed a small glossy photograph to Dr. Quotis. It was of a young, smiling Earthman, in color, showing the faintly tan, almost white Earth complexion starkly against a background of green vegetation.

Studying the picture, Quotis mused aloud, "It's possible. It certainly is possible. The features seem the same, Gawroi. But how can I be sure? Matlin - -"

"Matlin? He called himself The Reborn? He dared to!"

"It was symbolic to him, I guess."

"Symbolic? But he dared"

"See here, Gawroi. You're a scientist. You ought to keep a check on your emotions. And you oughtn't be so opinionated. Don't the highborn Kedaki look with sus-

picion on the doctrine of metempsychosis?"

"You extra-Kedaki like to think so," Gawroi said, keeping his voice down with an effort. "I - - I'm sorry for the outburst, doctor." But more than ever, he was convinced that the man who called himself Matlin was the Earthman Rhodes, an outsider who wanted to smash five thousand years of Kedaki tradition with an alleged seeking after the truth.

"Matlin, as I was saying," Quotis went on finally, "was utterly bald. His hair won't grow in, you see, until the follicles have had a chance to adjust to the new skin. Without hair, a face assumes different proportions. The nose seems larger, the brow more noble. Then, of course, Matlin's skin is purple, and that also makes a difference. Still, I'll admit it: it could be the same man."

"I thought so!" Gawroi said triumphantly. "Doctor, I sincerely want to find my friend. You'll help?"

"If Matlin contacts me, yes. Otherwise, I can do nothing."

"He had complete amnesia?"

"Total amnesia, yes."

"Even if there was something very important to him - - something he was working on and believed in very strongly, for example - - he couldn't remember

that?"

"No, but if he runs across it, it might serve to trigger his memory."

Gawroi stood up, shook his hands once more, chatted amicably for a few moments with the Arc-turan physician, then went outside. It was a dazzlingly bright day, and hot. Much of Junction City was still in ruins, great piles of rubble lining the streets, broken buildings - - their walls shattered, their insides exposed nakedly - - condemned but not yet torn down, aid stations only now being cleared away. But Gawroi was not thinking of this. He was thinking of *The Book of the Dead*, and of the Earthman Rhodes.

Somewhere, Rhodes had hidden *The Book* - - or, his version of *The Book*. Rhodes had done an admittedly magnificent job of forgery, or so the Five Bureau had said. Rhodes' *Book* looked like the real thing and, since the masses were ignorant, might serve to sway them. Naturally, Gawroi knew, this could not be accomplished overnight, but the seeds for discord and strife could be sowed by a clever extra-Kedaki like Rhodes in the night of ignorance and discontent. Then, Rhodes had to be found, had to be stopped, had to be killed if necessary.

But first Rhodes had to lead them to his *Book of the Dead*.

Gawroi's enormous hands clutched. He personally, would see that this was done.

CHAPTER V

THE MAN newly named Matlin, which meant The Reborn, stood at the bar in the Hotel Deneb. Matlin wore an inexpensive tunic supplied him by the Arcturan hospital, and still had a few silver denebs in his pocket, also courtesy of the Arcturan hospital. Matlin was not drunk, but wished that he was.

He should not have come here. He knew that now. It had been wrong to surrender to drink like this, before he had time to think, to prowl the damaged streets and seek out the familiar in a world which seemed totally alien because his mind was lost somewhere in the shattered prison building. Had he been a drunkard in his earlier life? or at least a not very forceful man who readily lost himself in some form of lethe or another when his problems weighed heavily on his shoulders? Had this, indeed, been the weak character he'd been trying to resurrect?

Lethe He thought: lethe. But what is lethe? It is not a Kedaki word, but in your thoughts you use it. Isn't it said that a man tends to think at least some of his

thoughts in his native tongue, no matter where he lives or how long he has been away from home?

Lethe. It meant: forgetfulness. The waters of . . . no, the river of forgetting. Lethe. It meant that all right. But in what language? This Matlin did not know.

The bar of the Hotel Deneb, since the hotel was Junction City's best, catered to extra-Kedaki and to highborn natives. You could always tell the highborn by the rich-looking tunics they wore, tell their ladies by the way you could see breast and loins through the transparent, clinging garments, and tell both sexes among the highborn by their arrogance toward lower born Kedaki and toward all extra-planetary peoples. You could, all right, Matlin thought desperately, but why do I think this? A low-born Kedaki would not: he would hope for rebirth, someday, as a highborn. And a highborn? But a highborn would never admit it, not even to himself.

Matlin ordered another glass of Sirian whisky with a soda chaser. Sirian? Why Sirian? He seemed to like the fiery brew, but Sirius was five hundred and some years across intergalactic space. Was he a Sirian? That didn't seem likely, for the Sirians were chauvinistic, rarely leaving their homeworld . . .

Chauvinistic. Another word, like

lethe. Not a Kedaki word. A word from somewhere else, but Matlin could not recall where. As it turned out, he did not have time to pursue the matter, for a voice at his elbow said:

"I'll say it again. You were eyeing my woman with lust."

This jolted Matlin, until he realized he was not being addressed. The words were spoken by an expensively-dressed high-born Kedaki on his left, but the man's face was averted. He was talking, Matlin realized, to a base-born Kedaki further down the bar who, from the looks of his tunic, probably had no business here.

Between them, an amused look on her face, stood a Kedaki woman. She was incredibly beautiful with the extremely arrogant beauty found among the highborn Kedaki ladies who, it was said, might have each toenail painted by a different lowborn slave if they so desired. Her face was pampered but insolent, and her body, its beauty of line and curve and hue enhanced rather than hidden by the diaphanous folds of her veil-like garment, was magnificent. She said, in a deep, throaty, contralto voice, "Now really, Felg. Don't you think that's enough?"

THE MAN named Felg was a big fellow, tall, as Matlin but

heavier, with a dueling scar on each cheek. Duels, Matlin knew, were common on Kedak as cop-ter zoning tickets were on other worlds, for you had nothing to lose in a duel but your life, and what did this matter against the possible loss of honor if your death would immediately usher a - - possibly better - - rebirth?

"I don't think it's enough," said Felg. "This lowborn was gawking at you and while you are beautiful, he should not gawk at another's woman."

"I am neither your woman nor anyone else's," the beautiful creature said coldly.

This angered Felg. If there had been the chance of preventing a duel, that chance was gone now, trampled in the dust of what might have been by the woman's insolent words. "Well, then," Felg said slowly, "you are my woman at least as long as I am your escort. You, there!" he roared, turning again to the lowborn Kedak who stood waiting quietly, patiently and almost indifferently. "Are you armed?"

"I am armed, master," said the lowborn. He was a small, thin Kedaki with a piping but unfrightened voice. Instinctively, Matlin sympathized with him. Smaller, weaker, with less to remember and less to look forward to, victim-

ized by a system hardly above slavery, he was forced by tradition to wait on the highborn Felg's pleasure, even if that pleasure were to mean death in an uneven duel with the spike-studded Kedaki maces.

Felg laughed harshly. "No dagger, you fool. I mean a mace."

"I carry no mace," the lowborn admitted.

"Barkeep!" roared Felg, but the barkeep, highborn as Felg himself, shook his head slowly, saying:

"We serve extra-Kedaki here, see? The place is full of them. There will be no duel here tonight, or any night."

"But it's lawful," said Felg stubbornly.

"Lawful or not - - " began the barkeep. Then the beautiful woman smiled at Felg, a smile not for him but at him, a baring of the teeth in amused contempt. And she hissed:

"Felg, I swear, you are a barbarian."

Felg slammed his hand down on the surface of the bar. "It is lawful. I demand my rights! Bring maces!"

"I await you, lord," said the lowborn.

"Not here," the barkeep said softly, not wanting to create a disturbance. Then he looked at

Felg's eyes. Felg's eyes told him that Felg had been made a fool of before the woman, but they did not tell him what Felg did not know: Felg had been made a fool of by himself. The eyes did say, however, that if Felg did not have satisfaction from the lowborn, he would have it from the barkeep himself. And the voice, a roaring, thundering bellow, confirmed this. "I'll duel with him here!" cried Felg. "Here and now I will!" He added softly, almost purring: "Or I'll duel with you outside, friend. Do you believe in metempsychosis, friend?"

Matlin knew what the barkeep's unspoken answer was by the ashen look which came over the man's face. He most assuredly did not believe. He was afraid to die. He did not want to duel with Felg, a bully and probably an expert with the mace. He sighed, shrugging his shoulders. He looked at the lowborn and shook his head. He said, "I'll get the maces."

"Room!" someone bellowed, excitement in his voice. "Give them room!"

Kedaki and extra-planetary moved away from the bar, forming a rough square a dozen paces across. The barkeep ducked through a doorway and Matlin heard a lady tourist from Polaris say, almost squealing the words,

"This is so exciting." The tone of her voice disgusted him. The extra-Kedaki, he thought. Perhaps they were guilty too. At least, if they enjoyed the fantastic mores of Kedak, if in any way they encouraged them, then they shared guilt with the Kedaki highborn.

But not equal guilt. No, not that. For clearly, the man named Felg was chiefly to blame here, Big, powerful-looking Felg - - a murderer. Because, Matlin told himself grimly, it would be murder. The smaller Kedaki, the lowborn, didn't have a chance. Looking at his face, Matlin knew that the man was aware of this. And Felg? Felg was aware of it too. In the case of the lowborn awareness did not bring terror; for virtually all lowborn Kedaki believed in reincarnation. Thus, facing death, Felg's victim was almost sure he would be reborn in a higher station in life. But Felg did not believe. Felg was a trained maceman; the scars on his cheeks - - white scar tissue over crushed cheekbones - - proved this. Felg would kill the lowborn and it would be cold-blooded murder morally if not in the eyes of the Kedaki law.

A BUZZ of eagerness stirred the crowd as the barkeep returned with the traditional *mel-*

gast, the metal bar from which the two dueling maces hung on hooks. The maces were a yard long, their stems extremely light-weight and thick enough around at the base for a man to hold comfortably, their heads round and heavy and black and studded with a score or so of half-inch long spikes. As the barkeep brought the *melgast* forward, the maces swung back and forth on their hooks.

The Polarjan woman who had been excited gasped. Whispers ran through the crowd. "Let me see them," Felg demanded coldly, and examined the maces as the barkeep lifted the *melgast* over the surface of the bar with both hands.

"You can still change your mind," the barkeep suggested.

Felg raked him with a glance. "Would you want me to?"

The barkeep could not stare at him long. "No," he said. "Not if you don't want to."

"I am ready, master," the lowborn said.

Felg bowed to him, mocking him. "Select your weapon, then, and tell me your name so I may have it for the report I must file after our duel."

The beautiful woman looked at him coldly. "You already have this man dead and cremated, don't you, Felg?" she asked contemptuously.

"He'll live on!" cried Felg, in mock reverence. "Don't we all. We live forever -- as we die forever! On with the cycle! Hooray for life! Hooray for death! Are you ready, lowborn? Ready for your passage to a higher station?"

The woman whispered fiercely, "You don't believe a word of that, do you?"

Instead of answering her, Felg hefted his mace and waited for the lowborn's reply. "Ranmut is my name," came the other's piping voice. And again he said, "I am ready, master." He held the mace uncertainly, awkwardly. It was obvious to everyone present that he barely knew how to use it and would not have a chance against the experienced Felg. But still, he had courage

No, Matlin thought, his courage is based upon a lie! *The Book of the Dead* -- a tissue of lies fabricated thousands of years ago and still keeping the lowborn Kedaki in fearful bondage to the highborn. But -- but how, Matlin wondered wildly, do I know this? How

He was very adept with the Kedaki mace. He knew that suddenly too, and at first the knowledge surprised him. Then the memory came. It was the first clear memory of the time before the Earthquake that he had exper-

ienced. It was a single memory-pictur , devoid of all connections, devoid of any real meaning. He was in a room. The walls were padded and the floor was padded. He had come there for exercise. It was -- it was a gymnasium. You fought with Kedaki maces in this gymnasium, but see? see? they were not real maces. They were padded instead of spiked and if you swung with all your might you could possibly knock your antagonist senseless as you would in Earth-style boxing, but nothing else. And, in the memory, Matlin usually won.

Also in the memory, Matlin's skin was the tan-white of Earthmen!

"Wait!" he blurted, and silence fell like a shroud on the large room.

Felg and the lowborn named Ranmut were squaring off with the maces. Felg snapped, "Well, what is it?"

Again the shroud of silence. Padded maces, thought Matlin. It was a memory, a vague, troubled unclear memory. Perhaps I was very good with padded maces, but in their padding they did not hold death, the kind of death this man Felg had delivered with spiked maces and would deliver again

"Well, come on, man, come on!" shouted the overwrought Felg impatiently. Ranmut merely looked

at Matlin, neither glad nor sorry for the temporary reprieve, awaiting the end which a five-thousand year old fabrication told him was merely the beginning.

Forever we die! - - these were the first words of the *Book of the Dead*. But - - to live again? The writers of the book had lied, for they hadn't known. No one had known, thought Matlin.

THE SIRIAN whisky roared through his veins. His vision clouded, then cleared. "I am Matlin," he said.

A Kedaki nearby gasped and Felg cried: "The Reborn! You dare to call yourself that?"

"That is no name," Ranmut whispered, his voice strange.

"I am Matlin, for the record you must keep," Matlin told Felg, his words dropping like peals of thunder on the silence in the great room. "I am bigger than this man Ranmut and I can use the mace. I challenge you, Felg."

Felg appraised him, then said, "Later, if you have a grievance. But I don't know you, Matlin."

"No! Now. I wish to take Ranmut's place." Don't think, he told himself. Don't think that in the memory your skin was white as an Earthman's And don't think that you fought with padded maces only.

A voice called: "It would be far fairer."

Other voices took it up, and Felg's beautiful woman companion turned and looked coolly, then with quickening interest, at Matlin. She smiled at him and it was a smile like consuming flames. She said, with a laugh, "Oh, Felg! Poor Felg, you're in for a fight now."

Ranmut stared at Matlin. Someone pushed Ranmut forward and Matlin took the mace from his hand. He patted the little man's shoulder because Ranmut still looked dubious, and then someone cried a warning. Matlin barely had time to realize it was the woman, and then - - from the corner of his eye he saw Felg charging!

Felg came so swiftly that Matlin barely had time to whirl and face him. Felg came like a rocket, his big brutal face contorted with hatred. Felg came with a wild bellow meant to stop Matlin dead in his tracks. Felg came with a rush and the rush spelled death. Then Felg swung his mace.

All this happened in a split-second. Matlin threw himself to the floor, lacking time to bring his own mace around to parry the unexpected attack. The mace blurred by inches over his head as he went down and he realized that it would have split his skull

like a ripe mellow had he still been standing. Spike-studded, it crashed into the side of the bar, splintering the richly-grained hardwood as if it had been a flimsy sheet of wickerwork.

The spikes caught and held in the wood, but with a wrench of his hand Felg got them loose before Matlin could climb to his feet. Felg swung again, putting his whole body behind the blow. He swung downward and the deadly head of the mace splintered the floor as it had splintered the hardwood bar. It had been so close that some of the spikes caught in Matlin's tunic. When he scrambled upright, he was half naked and there was a welt from his armpit to the bottom of his ribcage.

He swung his own mace, but Felg caught it expertly with the haft of his weapon, twisting suddenly and almost tearing the mace from Matlin's grasp. Then Felg advanced with a lightning-swift series of short, jolting blows from his weapon. Matlin took them all on the haft of his own, but his hands ached with the shock and his arms grew numb. Across the room he reeled before the powerful onslaught. Sparks leaped between the maces as they struck; the sounds were of a smithy in hell.

Felg was big, powerful. Matlin

knew he must summon memory to survive the attack, for already his arms dragged so wearily he barely could hold the mace crosswise in front of him with both hands to take the rain of blows. Something he must remember had to remember must bring forth to save his life

He fell abruptly to one knee, and the Polarian tourist woman gave a little scream of terror and enjoyment. Leering, sweat streaming from his face, Felg brought his mace up for the *coup*. And Matlin dropped his other knee to the floor.

Felg's face spoke mutely of Felg's knowledge of the move, but the heavy mace already swung down and could not be checked. It blurred across Matlin's shoulder, the spiked head splintering the hardwood floor behind him. For an instant, Felg leaned over him, wrenching at the mace helplessly and exposing his middle.

SLOWLY, aware he had all the time in the world, Matlin brought his own mace up. I'm going to kill this man, he thought. I can kill this man now. I merely have to drive the head of the mace against his abdomen, ripping through the wall of muscle to the quivering viscera beneath. He will scream, the blood will flow, the

mace will fall from his nerveless fingers, and they will hail me here as hero. But I have saved the man Ranmut's life, so why should I kill this one? The thought astonished him: it was no Kedaki thought

Symbolic of his triumph, he placed the head of his mace against Felg's belly and pushed. The big Kedaki stumbled back, the wind driven from him. He collapsed on the floor and his mace, still spikefast in the hardwood, quivered there. Matlin walked to it, braced both feet, strained his back, and drew it clear. Then he took both maces and returned them to the *melgast*.

"No! No!" screamed Felg, his breath returning. "Kill me! Kill me, you fool!"

Ranmut said, but quietly, "Kill him, lord. He would have killed me. He expects to be killed. Otherwise, his honor dies. Kill him, lord."

Matlin looked at the barkeep, who shrugged and held his silence. The faces of the crowd told him nothing. And Felg's woman? She had no love for Felg: she was Felg's companion for the night, no more. She wore the look of a Sphinx on her beautiful face and when she saw Matlin watching her the smile she turned on him was a smiling of the mouth only. Her

eyes were cold and distant, but beautiful.

Matlin took one of the maces from the *melgast*. The spikes held blood, and bits of scraped skin and flesh adhered to them. So this was the mace Felg had used, for blood had been drawn from Matlin's ribs. With this mace, Matlin walked to the man he had conquered. Felg had not risen from the floor. He sat there and he looked up at Matlin, who made no move to use the mace, and he said, his voice a tight whisper now, barely audible, "Will you kill me? I can't stand the waiting."

"I read somewhere," Matlin heard himself saying, "that at the moment before death life is so precious that a man will crave it even if it is a life of torment on torment, a life of torture, a life of terrible pain. But life, any life, rather than the black sleep of death. Life as a slave, and toil without end, and streaming sweat mixed with blood, but life! This I read, but of course it was not on Kedak, for here on Kedak death means nothing. Well, does it?"

"Kill me now," said Felg, uncertainly.

Matlin lifted the mace slowly. "Here on Kedak, how can death hold such terrors? Death is not the unknown. Death is not a sleep

of forever, a sleep without waking, or the unproven expectation of sharing a dream of immortality with the god. Death here on Kedak is merely a way station in the passage of life, many lives. So why should we fear death? You believe this, do you not? Believe the transcripts from the *Book of the Dead* as our religious teachers read them?"

"I believe," said Felg quickly, without passion, without conviction.

The mace was high over Matlin's head now. The crowd came close, watching. Someone touched the single mace remaining on its hook, and the mace swung slowly. The swinging motion caught Felg's eye and he watched, fascinated. But the mace was out of reach and he must have known it. Everything but death was now out of reach, forever out of reach.

"That death is not a cold sleep from which there is no awakening?"

"Yes, yes!"

"That reincarnation will come to you?" Why am I doing this, Matlin wondered. It was to prove a point: but he knew not what point he wished to prove.

"Yes, yes"

"That the loss of life is to be suffered before the loss of honor?"

"Yes. By the holy pages of *The*

Book of the Dead, kill me!"

"All this you believe?"

Light caught the spikes of the mace. They flashed. Someone had to carry the Polarian tourist to a chair, and settle her there. Sweat made her clothing cling to her body, revealing a figure like a sow's. Sweat beaded her face, but her ugly little eyes gazed on Matlin as if he'd made love to her.

"State your belief," said Matlin.

"Kill me." A barely audible whisper.

"State your belief, Felg."

Felg's eyes riveted on the mace. His face was gray. His eyes pleaded with the mace, as if cold metal, death-dealing metal, might heed the message Matlin would not. Silence was a wall between this room and the rest of the world.

And Felg screamed, "I don't want to die! I don't want to die!"

His eyes blinked. Tears streamed down his cheeks and he rolled over to fall on his knees before Matlin. "If you had killed me at once," he sobbed bitterly. "If you would have killed me. Damn you, I don't believe, I don't believe"

"Then live," said Matlin indifferently, all at once not caring if Felg lived or died.

A roar went up from the crowd of extra-Kedaki, but the Kedaki themselves were sullen. Highborn

like Felg, they also did not believe in reincarnation. They saw themselves on the floor, craven before what seemed to be a lowborn member of their race, lives spared and honor destroyed.

The beautiful woman who had been with Felg took Matlin's elbow. "They're ugly now," she said. "You'd better get out of here."

"What difference does it make to you?"

"Difference? No difference. Felg is a fool and you gave me pleasure."

"Come with me," Matlin said on impulse.

It was very hot outside and for the first time when they reached the street Matlin knew that he had been close to death.

CHAPTER VI

"**L**ISTEN," said Matlin. "You don't have to come with me."

"You told me to."

"That was before."

They had walked a long time through the hot damp stillness of the Kedaki night. They had not spoken. Matlin's thoughts drifted aimlessly; the woman was content to share his silence.

"Listen," he said again as they passed the bright glowing lights of the Junction City bus depot,

where the big gas-turbine-driven busses snarled as they turned out of the streams of traffic. "I'm going somewhere."

"You're walking, yes."

"I don't mean that. Somewhere. And I don't even know your name."

"It's Haazahri. Where are you going?"

Matlin said, "Balata 'kai."

"The ruins of the First City? Why in the world"

"I don't know why. It doesn't matter why. Something in me says go there to open the tombs of memory."

"You don't have memory?"

"The Earthquake," said Matlin. "I remember nothing before it."

"Well, you can't go to Balata 'kai."

"You don't have to come with me."

"I didn't mean that. It's against the law."

"Since when?" demanded Matlin.

"Since the quake. Until they are rebuilt, the ruins are no place for tourists. Until they are rebuilt, the ruins are a fine place for thieves. Since the records of the birth of our civilization are among those ruins, the police have orders to kill any trespassers. That's why you can't go. Is it terribly

important to you?"

"I feel that it is. I don't know why. As if - - as if something's waiting there for me."

"You shouldn't tell me. I'm supposed to report you. I - -"

"Will you?" Matlin asked indifferently.

"I will not," said Haazahri promptly. "I'll go with you."

Matlin shook his head, bemused. He couldn't believe his ears. His troubles were his troubles. Why should the beautiful Haazahri accompany him? Why should she want to?

He asked, "Why?"

"Because you gave me pleasure."

Matlin felt disappointed. "You enjoyed the beating Felg got? You enjoyed his shaming?"

"No, I don't mean that. It's your name and how . . . how you live up to its suggestion of heresy. Religion is a good thing on other worlds, Matlin. I have spoken with people. On the planets of Antares, where the folk accept with choice a pantheism of total godhood, that is good; on Earth, where several religions freely proclaim the worship of a single great deity under different names, that is good. But don't you see, here on Kedak - - but of course, you see. The point I make is, you say what you believe. If another . . ."

"But I don't believe. I'm an iconoclast."

"If another feels as you do, but says nothing . . ."

"You, Haazahri?"

"I. And so you give me pleasure. You're a strange man, Matlin, but a brave one. If you lost your memory, is Matlin a new name you have given yourself?"

"Yes."

"I wonder," Haazahri mused, looking at him and smiling. She was a tall woman, her face almost on a level with his own. She stared frankly into his eyes, boldly, still smiling. "I wonder if you have any family, if you are married . . ."

"I'm a long way from home," Matlin said abruptly.

"Now, what does that mean? What is your mind trying to tell you?"

Matlin shook his head in wonder. "The words - - just came!"

Haazahri was still smiling. "No, you wouldn't be married."

"Why not?"

"Because," said Haazahri, "until this day you hadn't met me."

"Haazahri, listen . . . " he began.

"Don't start that again. I'm coming with you to Balata 'kai." "Haazahri . . ."

But she swung to him abruptly, clutching his tunic and drawing herself close to him. "Matlin,"

she breathed tremulously. "Matlin, love" They were in the pleasure district of Junction City, the lights a mad whirl-and-flash, the crowds noisy, drunken, unconcerned.

They stood together, as stone. But the blood boiled in their veins, and their hearts were not stone.

"Haazahri," he said. Then he kissed her.

CHAPTER VII

GAWROI'S office at Kedaki College was furnished home-style with low benches and a central mat rather than chairs and a desk. The home-style furnishings, in their simple beauty, were not popular here on Kedak. Typical, thought Gawroi angrily. For five thousand years home-style is good enough for the Kedaki. For five thousand years no muddle-brained agitators question the value of home style, its beauty or its function. Then a wave of false galactic brotherhood sweeps Kedak and the big, ungainly desks and chairs clutter more offices every day, so a man finds it difficult to move about without striking his body against some sharp edge or other.

And emotionally? Emotionally it is the same. The Kedaki religion is - - the Kedaki religion. The

cornerstone on which the world-spanning structure that is the edifice of Kedaki culture rests. The womb of knowledge and the sum of knowledge. But - - questioned now. Doubted secretly by some among the highborn, as if they get a masochistic satisfaction from believing their gods are false and their fifty-generation belief in megalomania an attempt of their own class to keep the lowborn in servitude. Why, it was ridiculous!

"Come in, come in, my dear fellow!" Gawroi boomed, motioning his visitor to one of the low benches. "So you are Felg."

"I came as soon as I saw your announcement," Felg said, seating himself uncomfortably on the low bench.

"Tell me about it, Felg. What you said by phone, it could be very important."

Felg licked his lips nervously. "You realize I'm not usually an informer, but when I saw that the Chairman of the Department of Archaeology at the College and the police were both seeking this Matlin"

"The police were not my idea," Gawroi growled. And they weren't, but not for the reason he would have this Felg think. If the Five Bureau decided to ring in the police, he supposed that was the Five Bureau's business. But the police

might make Matlin - - the Earthman Rhodes, he was sure - - wary. "Now, then. You say you know the whereabouts of Matlin?"

"I think so."

"May I ask, Felg, why you" Gawroi let his voice trail off, hoping Felg would interrupt him. And Felg did.

"Why I inform on this man? Because it is my duty as a loyal Kedaki, as a servant of my world and the world-idea which governs us, through five thousand years, from Balata 'kai."

"Good," said Gawroi. "Now tell me."

"Last night the man Matlin took a bus to Haatok."

"The northern outskirt of the city?"

"Yes, Haatok. This was as close to Balata 'kai as public conveyance could take him."

"He's going to Balata 'kai?"

"The bus was night darkened. I was on the bus. I got off the bus at Haatok, as he did. He was in the company of a woman named Haazahri."

"Haazahri," said Gawroi, writing the name down. "Go ahead."

"On the bus, he and the woman Haazahri spoke softly, but I heard some of their words. In the morning, that is, today, they were going to Balata 'kai."

"Why? Did they say why?"

"I failed to hear them. Why do you want this Matlin?"

"Isn't his illegal entry into Balata 'kai enough?"

"You didn't know that," said Felg, "until I told you."

"I'll ask you a question, Felg. Why did you want to inform on Matlin?"

"I already told you"

"And I'm asking again. What were your personal reasons?"

"I have no personal reasons."

"Well, not that it matters."

Felg said suddenly, "You want to kill Matlin, don't you?"

"Eh? What's that?" Gawroi, startled, looked down at the reclining man. He had an impulse to kick the smirking face. Then he calmed himself with an effort and said, "But that's ridiculous! I have reason to believe that the man who calls himself Matlin is actually an Earthman named Rhodes, a victim of amnesia, suffered in the quake. Rhodes was a colleague of mine, you see, and"

"I hate Matlin!" Felg said in a soft but hate-filled voice. "There's a brother to my hate in this room, I know there is, and nothing you can say will hide it. But don't you see, Gawroi? You don't have to tell me about your hatred. You can keep it secret. The important fact is, you hate. You

want to kill this man. I hate him. I want to destroy him. I hate that man."

"Rhodes" began Gawroi mildly.

"Rhodes? All right, all right, Rhodes. Maybe Matlin is an Earthman somehow wearing purple skin. I don't care. It means nothing, nothing. Together, if we can find Matlin out there, in Balata 'kai"

GAWROI was thinking: perhaps I can use this man's hatred. Because now that the Five Bureau had seen fit to call in the police, it was very dangerous. The police could be a problem. The police did not work secretly. Whatever the police did would be open to public scrutiny. So, if the police caught Matlin-Rhodes, he might escape with his life - - and even his secret. The secret! The knowledge Matlin-Rhodes carried around in his head, lost to the world, lost even to himself - - that was important!

Rhodes had said it was *The Book of the Dead*. The real *Book of the Dead*. Now, Gawroi and any loyal Kedaki knew better; it was not *The Book of the Dead*; it was a fantastically clever forgery; and it could bring the multiple hells of uncertainty to Kedak if Rhodes were given the chance to find where

he had hidden it and the chance to make its contents public. Rhodes had told him about it. "*The Book of the Dead*, Gawroi," he had said, before the quake. "I'll tell you about this holy of holies of yours, Gawroi, and if I'm irreverent, I can't help being irreverent. Man, look around you! Must the lowborn remain lowborn, with no chance to better themselves, generation after generation? Do you really need human footstools to support the soles and heels of your vanity? They thought so for five thousand years, and they gave you a legacy. They gave you *The Book of the Dead*, with its lies and exaggerations and fabrications and deceit. Reincarnation! The writers of that book didn't know anything more about reincarnation than I do! But the lowborn swallowed their story for five thousand years. Well, it's time this stopped"

And Gawroi had said, "What's it your business? You, an Earthman?"

"Sure, I'm an Earthman," Rhodes had answered. "But I'm a scientist first. I seek the truth, Gawroi, and I've found the truth. It won't be hidden much longer."

"Hidden?" Gawroi had asked incredulously. "It's hidden?"

"Hell, yes, it's hidden. Don't you think I know the score? I'd

be beaten if necessary, for possession of that book."

Beaten was an understatement. The next day, Rhodes had been imprisoned. His mistake, Gawroi thought coldly, was confiding in me. I was a fellow scientist, though, and men like Rhodes make much of the scientific fraternity. Well, I'm a scientist second, a Kedaki first.

And now, this. Now Felg. Through Felg and with Felg, he could perhaps get to Matlin-Rhodes before the police. And make sure that the false *Book of the Dead*, and its forger, were not allowed to poison the minds of a whole people.

He asked Felg, "Why didn't you go to the police?"

"At first," Felg said, "I thought I would go to the police. There in Haatok, though, I changed my mind. Listen, Gawroi: I reasoned that if the police wanted him and you wanted him too, then your reason must be more than merely academic. And, while this Matlin spent the night in an Haatokian inn with the woman Haazahri, I told myself: Gawroi's the man for you. Go to Gawroi because neither your personal reason for hating Matlin, nor his, need bow before the will of the police. The police, capable but indifferent, might bungle. But Gawroi and yourself - -"

"That's enough," said Gawroi. "I see what you mean. Felg listen to me. If we do this thing together, if we join forces, my motives must never be questioned."

"Nor mine."

"Good. Very well, Felg. I hate this Matlin. And you - you want Matlin killed?"

"Killed," echoed Felg.

"One promise. He is not to be killed until he leads me to something."

"Where? We can't be chasing all over Kedak."

"In Balata 'kai, probably. That's why he went there."

"Is he really an-Earthman named Rhodes?"

"I believe so. Does it matter?"

"It doesn't matter to me. But it might matter to the police."

"Exactly. You haven't told anyone else?"

"No."

"And the woman with Rhodes? Haazahri? What of her?"

"You leave Haazahri to me," Felg said.

Gawroi shook his hand, regretting the need for the Earth-style gesture which had swept the galaxy. He had an instinctive dislike for Felg, but thought Felg, just the man to help him, just the man to join him at Balata 'kai, just the man to see to it that Matlin-Rhodes never returned to Junction City.

alive

CHAPTER VIII

BALATA 'KAI!

Even the word was like heady wine.

Balata 'kai!

Where, five thousand years ago, civilization - - and a lie - - had been born on Kedak. Where now the ruins were ghostly in the early dawnlight, standing like grim sentinels against the still dark sky, silhouetted there on the limestone crag above the floor of the desert.

"Would you believe it, Matlin," Haazahri said, "I'm a native of Junction City, but I've never seen the ruins of Balata 'kai?"

"Sure. It's like that all over. Only the tourists are interested in what makes where you live famous," Matlin said, and smiled. He was happy. He felt happy for the first time since his accident. The woman? She was part of the reason, but not most of it. Did he love her? He hardly knew, and wouldn't press it yet, not until he remembered. Because it wasn't fair either to Haazahri or whatever he was, whoever he was, in lost memory.

It was Balata 'kai. He belonged here. Somehow, he could sense that. The navel of his people, was that the reason? Because any Ke-

daki would feel at home where the world-idea that governed his planet had been born, fifty centuries ago?

But not Matlin. Matlin was an iconoclast. Matlin did not believe, Matlin wished to smash idols, Matlin wished

Did he? He didn't know what he wished. He'd come here on an impulse. Idol-breaker? But why? And what idols?

"Look," he said, pointing at the limestone crag. There was something at once ineffably serene and tumultuously exciting about the five thousand year old slabs and columns perched there. There were stories they could tell, stories of generations long turned to dust, stories of the past and how, from the past, the present came, child of history, buffeted by forces it only half-understood, the helpless, passionate, living present, the moment for which, whether we admit it or not, we all live, ephemeral, hardly palpable, thrilling and then gone, dead, history, the navel for tomorrow which is today

"It is beautiful," Haazahri said slowly.

A wind stirred, swirling little puffs of sand at their feet, their clothing, even their faces. The sun was very hot already and would be much hotter soon. Dazzling white Deneb, far brighter than Sol

Sol!

But Sol was the day star of the planet Earth, remote on the other edge of this small filamental arm of the galaxy. So, why Sol? Look at your skin, Matlin. Matlin, the Reborn! Proud, insolent name! But look at your skin. Gaze on it. You're Kedaki. Of course you're Kedaki. What else could you be?

"Have you ever been here before?" Haazahri asked.

"Yes, I think so."

"Probably it's why you wanted to come."

"I've been here. I know I have, Haazahri. Many times. Straight ahead, there, see where I'm pointing? There used to be a staircase there, carved in the living rock. For tourists to climb to the top, to see the ruins. See the jumble of rocks now? We'll have to climb, but it won't be like climbing stairs. We'll - - "

"Get down!" Haazahri cried suddenly, and threw herself at him, and bore them both to the sand, where they lay still. "Where you were pointing," she whispered. "Look, but don't turn your head. Don't move. Someone's up there."

They were a hundred paces from the base of the limestone crag, obscure in the dimness of its early morning shadow. The crag was perhaps another hundred paces high and at the top, where the

three tallest columns of Balata 'kai stood, piercing the sky for half the height of the crag or more, a figure was marching.

"Police," whispered Haazahri. "Has he seen us?"

"No," said Matlin. "It's dark down here. We're all right, I think."

"There is treasure in the ruins," Haazahri told him. "It's what the tourists come to see mostly. But since the quake, the ruins are off-limits. Thieves have been out here in the dark of night, defiling the temples and"

"Defiling?"

"Defiling, if one believes."

"Do you believe, Haazahri?"

"You're a strange man, Matlin. We're down on our bellies in the sand, hiding from the police, and yet you ask a question like that. I - - I don't know if I believe or not. I believe a people need something, some faith"

"Do you believe in reincarnation? Do you believe that every poor craven lowborn, if he leads a meek, servile life, will be rewarded in a fresh incarnation by moving up a rung in the social ladder? Do you believe?"

SLOWLY, Haazahri shook her head. "No," she said, confusion in her eyes. "I never could admit it to myself before, Matlin.

But you have a way you put it so simply. No, Matlin. I don't believe that."

"Good, because otherwise we would have been defilers."

"I don't understand."

"I'm not sure I do, either. But we're going up there. We can work our way up among the rocks, when the guard is out of sight. We can - - "

"It will be dangerous."

"I have to chance it. You don't."

"I'll go with you. I already said so, Matlin. But why will we be defilers?"

"Because there's something up there. Oh, I don't know what. Something, though. Waiting for me. My head, Haazahri! My memory! As if I've been sundered, disembodied, and part of me is up there. I - - I had it once, this thing. I had it, and lost it. No wait. *I had it, then hid it.* It was something - - dynamite, Haazahri. Something so explosive that I didn't know what to do with it but knew I must do something. Like playing with fire, the memory says."

"What kind of fire?"

"Fire for the Kedaki. Cultural fire. Idol-breaking, iconoclastic "

"But you don't remember what?"

"No."

- "And the way you speak of us.

The Kedaki. As if you, as if you're - - alien."

Matlin said nothing. His head ached with the half-thoughts, the dream-thoughts. The wind had died down and he breathed deeply of the clear hot morning air. When he looked up and saw the ruins of Balata 'kai silhouetted against the brightening sky, he could see nothing of the guard.

"Come," he said, and stood up, helping Haazahri to her feet. She leaned against him for a moment, the maiden suppleness of her ripe against his thews and chest. He held her and she breathed against his ear, touching the lobe of it with her lips. "I love you, Matlin," she said. "Whoever you are, whatever you are. You know that, don't you?"

"Haazahri," he said, pushing her away gently. "You may only hurt yourself. I don't know. I don't know! I can't say anything, can't think anything of that, until I know. My name is not Matlin. I don't even know my name."

A faint, wistful smile played about her lips as she said, "All right, lead on to what's left of that staircase of yours."

They took half a dozen strides toward the base of the limestone crag. Limestone. On the desert, with little water to erode it, how long would limestone endure? A

dozen eternities, thought Matlin, and more. Balata 'kai - - forever

Suddenly, he was running. Something had moved in the shadow at the foot of the cliff. Since it hadn't called out, whatever it was, he hoped that it would not. He ran silently, swiftly.

He reached the spot. There was nothing. He gazed around. The shadows were dark.

Something just above his head made a sound. A pebble was dislodged, dropped on his shoulder and to the sand. He did not look up. On his way he'd seen a ledge there, its flat surface at about the height his hand could reach. The ledge, narrow, barely wide enough for a man to stand on, would not be empty now.

His hand blurred up at it, grasped something which yielded, then struggled. He tugged and a voice pleaded: "Lord, I'll fall!"

With a yank, he pulled the man off the ledge. He had hold of the man's ankle, then let go of it, and leaped on the man when he had fallen to the sand. There was a brief scuffle, and he had the man by the throat. He let his hands go loose for a moment and hissed:

"Who are you?"

"Please, lord. I mean no harm."

"Who are you?"

Just then Haazahri came up. "Why, I know this fellow," she said. "And so do you, Matlin."

HE LOOKED again. It was a woe-begotten face, meek, homely, the eyes terror-filled. Its owner said, "I am Ranmut the lowborn, lord."

"Ranmut!" Matlin cried.

"Yesterday you took my place and won, though why you did not kill Felg, I do not know." He grinned hopefully when Matlin's fingers did not return to his throat. "Lord, I came seeking you."

"You followed us all the way out here from Junction City last night?" Matlin asked, amazed.

"It was the least I could do. You saved my life, lord, and while the life means nothing, is but one pathway among many, nevertheless this lowborn like many has a family and even if I go on to a higher pathway that wouldn't help my wife and children, who probably would have starved. Therefore, lord, am I thankful."

"You followed just to tell me this?"

"No, lord. Last night Felg was very angry. When you left the bar with this lovely lady, Felg came after you."

Matlin looked at Haazahri. She nodded, said, "He would."

"All the way to Balata 'kai?" Matlin asked.

"Not this far, lord. The man Felg came as far as Haatok."

"Don't tell me you were on the same bus with us?"

"Yes. And Felg also. Then, last night, after reading the newspaper, Felg rushed back to Junction City. I have saved the newspaper, lord," Ranmut said proudly.

"Saved it?"

"I took the liberty of following Felg back to the bus station. He deposited the newspaper in a trash receptacle. He had marked something."

"Let me see that," Matlin urged as he heard the rustle of paper. Ranmut spread a crumpled sheet before him on the sand and he saw that a small part of the first column was circled in red.

He read, his heart thumping against his ribs: " professor of archaeology at Kedak College. Ser Gawroi believes this Matlin to be the missing Earth scientist, Philip Rhodes. While the police maintain that Rhodes is harboring some unspecified material deemed not in the best interests of Kedak, Ser Gawroi would not comment on this. 'Rhodes,' the archaeologist said, 'was a colleague. If Rhodes is sick and needs help, we'll have to find him.'"

"No reason was given as to why

the alleged Earthman was seen in the streets of Junction City last night, to all appearances a native of Kedak. His name, according to Gawroi, is Matlin. If anyone has any knowledge of"

Then Haazahri took the paper and read it. She returned it to Ranmut, her hand trembling. "Do you know Gawroi?" she asked Matlin.

"No."

"An Earthman? Do you think that's what you are - - purple skin or not?"

"Don't look at me like that," Matlin said, smiling. "Earthmen are human too. Just as human as Kedaki."

"I know, but - -"

"Yes, I think I'm an Earthman. I think I'm this Philip Rhodes. I - -"

"Oh, Matlin! Then you remember?"

"No, but there have been other things - - no time to go into them now." Quotis, he thought. The Arcturan doctor. There had been no mention of Quotis, but there should have been. It was as if the Kedaki authorities and this Gawroi wanted to ease Quotis out of the picture, and Matlin did not like that. Why? Why shouldn't Quotis have been contacted? Quotis knew more about Matlin than anyone did. Gawroi disturbed him

more than the police. He sensed that he knew the Kedaki archaeologist. Besides, if Gawroi's purpose for finding Rhodes had not been sinister, wouldn't he seek Quotis for whatever help the Arcuran could offer?

"It means something to you, lord?" Ranmut asked, indicating the newspaper.

When Matlin answered, his words were addressed to Haazahri. "Tell me, would your friend Felg go to the police or to this Gawroi?"

"Felg would avoid the police if he could. Do you trust this Gawroi?"

"No," said Matlin promptly, not bothering to give his reason.

"Then you think Felg and the archaeologist are now in league against you?"

Matlin nodded, grasped Ranmut's shoulders. "Ranmut," he said, "I don't have to tell you you've done enough for us already. You came all the way out here to help, and --"

"I have done nothing, lord. Last night you saved my life, for my family."

"Do you wish to stay at Balata 'kai?"

"We lowborn are told Balata 'kai is a frightful place," said Ranmut, shaking his head dolefully. "We lowborn are told it is

most dangerous for us to approach this shrine."

"And still you came," Matlin marveled. "Will you leave now?"

Ranmut shuffled his feet in the sand. "I'll stay if the Lord Matlin wishes."

But Matlin shook his head. "By all means go back."

"If the Lord needs me --"

"No, you can deliver a message for me in Junction City. In the Arcuran hospital, to a Dr. Quotis. Tell him that his patient Matlin is seeking his lost memory at Balata 'kai. Show him the newspaper article and say for certain reasons Matlin does not trust the archaeologist Gawroi. And tell him Matlin has not gone to the police because first he must find something which the police don't want him to find. Ask Quotis to contact the Earth authorities in Junction City, if he thinks that best. You'll do this?"

"Of course, lord," Ranmut said simply, and bowed.

"And don't do that. Don't bow. You're a man, Ranmut. You're as good a man as I am, or Felg, or anyone."

"Yes, lord," said Ranmut doubtfully. He smiled shyly at Haazahri, then Matlin offered his hand and Ranmut shook it solemnly and trudged back across the sands on his long walk to Haatok.

RANMUT was in luck, for a bus was just arriving that would soon take him back to Junction City. He jingled the few remaining denebs in his pocket thinking, proudly, that he had not asked Matlin for money. He owed the strange-talking highborn Kedaki this much: he would defend the message to the alien Quotis with his life if necessary, and it seemed ridiculous to ask money for it, even for the bus fare to Junction City.

He stood in the dusty throngs on the raised sidewalk alongside the bus while its passengers stepped onto the ramp; stretched themselves, and claimed their baggage. Suddenly, he froze. Two men came through the wide bus doors together. The very large man, he did not know, but the reasonably large one he did. The reasonably large one was Felg and Ranmut turned away quickly, trying to push his way through the crowd. But Ranmut was a small, slender man, and arms, legs and bodies could easily detain him. It was very hot there, and he began to sweat. He felt the sweat streaming from his face, dampening his armpits, coursing down his sides and flanks. He pushed and struggled in the pressing crowd, and the ranks of the indifferent, as if in league with his enemies, closed

in.

"Careful, lowborn!" an indignant Kedaki woman chirped, and Ranmut offered her an obsequious smile, then helplessly felt the surging crowd, pushing forward now to find seats on the bus, turning him so that he faced Felg and the man who must be Gawroi.

The two highborn Kedaki were just alighting from the bus, their feet touching down on the section of the ramp which had been roped off for disembarking passengers. Gawroi said something, and Felg answered. They were very close. They were far closer than Ranmut had realized. Then Felg pointed and his finger, unwavering, speared air in Ranmut's direction. Ranmut tried to make himself very small. Sweat beaded his brow, stung his eyes. He wanted to disappear into his mean clothing. Felg pointed again and walked quickly with Gawroi to the rear of the crowd, where Ranmut lost them.

Several minutes later, the crowd had swept him to the doors of the bus. He held his three denebs overhead in one wet hand, waiting for the conductor to exchange them for a ticket to Junction City. Heads taller than his were everywhere. He could not see the conductor. Then something plucked the three denebs from his hand

and a smile of relief lit his woe-begotten features momentarily. He expected to feel the bus ticket thrust between his fingers, where he would clutch it almost lovingly. It did not matter that the bus was already crowded and he would have standing room all the way back to Junction City. It mattered only that Felg had not pointed in his direction, that by now Felg and the archaeologist Gawroi were gone from the depot, and

A hand closed on his elbow. A voice hissed in his ear: "This way, Ranmut." He knew the voice, and despaired. It was Felg.

They took him quickly from the bus station and thence across the hot dusty streets of Haatok to a small hotel where a sleepy-eyed desk clerk admitted them, gave them a big brass key and went back to doing absolutely nothing and wishing he could do less without even seeing their faces. Ranmut wanted to scream out for help, but the hotel clerk would be no help at all. Ranmut allowed them, Felg and the man Gawroi, to lead him upstairs to a small, dingy room with scabbing walls and a dirty floor and a faintly foul smell. Gawroi, who had held his elbow all the way from the bus station, flung him across the room as Felg shut the door. He fell on

the bed and he did not weigh much, but the bed collapsed under him. At another time, it would have been very funny.

"What are you doing in Haatok?" Felg snapped.

He got up. Felg pushed him and he fell on the mattress and remained there.

"What are you doing in Haatok?"

He was not glib. He had never been glib. He could think of absolutely no answer, no fiction to substitute for the truth. He remained silent. Something rustled as he leaned uncomfortably on his left side. It was the newspaper with the circled article. If Felg found that, Felg would know. So, Felg must not find it. He shifted his weight to that side, trying to cover the telltale edge of paper protruding from his pocket.

"What are you doing?" Felg said.

He rolled over. The paper rustled. He wanted to scream.

Felg took hold of his arm and dragged him to his feet. The other man, Gawroi, merely stood and watched. Felg was going to get the newspaper, Ranmut knew. He broke away and ran toward the door. Felg stuck his foot out and Ranmut fell over it headlong, skidding across the dirty floor to the door, where he lay in a heap.

Directly in front of his face was Gawroi's large shoe, the toe under his chin. But Gawroi's shoe did not move.

FELG REACHED down and got the newspaper. His face became dark with blood when he saw it. He pulled Ranmut to his feet and shook the paper before his face and bellowed, "Where did you get this?"

"In the bus depot, lord."

Felg thrust Ranmut back toward the broken bed and showed the newspaper to Gawroi. "I marked it. It's my paper," he admitted.

"That was clumsy of you, wasn't it?" Gawroi said. He had a powerful voice, but there seemed to be very little concern in it, as if whatever happened hardly mattered to him at all. "So now Rhodes knows you're after him."

"You think this slave told Rhodes?"

"Look at him. Dust-covered. Can't you see he's been on the desert, Felg? Can't you see anything?"

"Yes," Felg grumbled. "Then what can we do?"

Instead of answering, Gawroi said to Ranmut: "You realize we can do with you as we wish. No one knows we brought you here. The hotel clerk saw nothing. What sort of errand are you running for

Rhodes?"

"Who," said Ranmut, "is Rhodes?"

"For Matlin."

Ranmut said nothing.

Felg growled, "We can break the bones in your body one at a time, you fool!"

"Yes, lord," said Ranmut meekly, speaking to gain courage from the sound of his own voice.

"But we won't do anything of the sort," Gawroi said. "Why should we? Listen."

A rumbling sound could be heard in the street. It became a growl and then a loud smooth purr of power. "The bus to Junction City," Gawroi said. "The only bus. What can this fellow do here in Haatok."

"He can go to the police."

"Who are seeking Matlin? Don't be ridiculous."

"Well, I don't trust him."

"Did I say I trusted him? But it doesn't matter, if he's quite helpless."

"Alive, he isn't helpless."

Gawroi said, "Violence satisfies a certain need in you, doesn't it? Do you want to hurt this little fellow? Is that what you wish? I have no interest in the matter, but I am ready to go to Balata 'kai."

"Alive, he isn't helpless," Felg repeated.

Ranmut did not let the relief show on his face. Words now, just

words. They were going to let him go. And somehow, for the first time in his life, he wanted to live. It was very important that he lived. He had no wish to die. Because he did not believe? In truth, he could not tell himself that. Because he had always been a good man, if a lowborn, and had no desire for reincarnation if the highborn were men such as Felg and Gawroi? Something of that passed through his mind, but it was not altogether clear. I'm going to live, he thought. After all, I'm going to live. And he allowed himself the luxury of a slow smile. The smile dropped from his face when Gawroi said:

"All right, Felg. Do as you wish. I won't interfere with your pleasure. But I'm going downstairs. I'm renting a sand-car to take us to Balata 'kai. I'll meet you outside."

"Alive, he - -"

"Don't try to rationalize it for my benefit. Do as you wish. I have utterly no interest in the matter." Gawroi gave Ranmut one final, utterly indifferent look, and left the room. That look told Ranmut his doom was sealed.

He was small and weak and Felg was a strapping, strong high-born. Felg said, when the door shut, "You had an extra day of life, for you should have died by my

mace."

Ranmut said nothing.

Felg said, "Are you happy? You probably led a life exemplary for its lack of significance, as a lowborn should. You ought to be happy - - your next incarnation will be a higher one."

"Please kill me if you are going to, lord," said Ranmut.

"Don't you believe? Aren't you glad for the chance to die? What have you to live for?" Beads of sweat stood out on Felg's forehead, and Ranmut did not understand.

"Kill me, lord. I won't resist, I won't prolong it."

"Then you do believe?" demanded Felg softly, passionately, his fingers closing on Ranmut's frail throat without applying pressure.

"No, lord," said Ranmut. "I do not believe."

"You've got to believe in reincarnation!" Felg screamed.

"I no longer believe."

"You must! Don't you see, you must?"

"I only know that my belief fades like the leaves in autumn in deep southern climes."

"Believe!" screamed Felg.

This was all madness to Ranmut. He waited for the fingers to tighten on his throat, to constrict there. But they did not.

CHAPTER IX

"Believe!" The hands uncoiled, made weak fists and beat without strength against Ranmut's chest, beat beseechingly. "I need your belief!" Felg screamed, and, when next he spoke, he was sobbing with bitterness and fear. "I need your belief, please oh please, I need it to make my own belief strong. I need it, I need you, Ranmut, please, you've got to believe, because you're a lowborn and you have nothing to live for and if you don't believe then surely I, I can't believe either and that leaves nothing Ranmut, Ranmut, I don't want to die, Ranmut"

Despite everything, Ranmut felt himself engulfed by waves of pity. He said, softly, "But you're not going to die, lord."

Felg hit him and his eyes and nose stung, the hot blood trickling from his nostrils. Then Felg sobbed and did not look at Ranmut again. Sitting on the broken bed, Ranmut watched the big man lumber, sobbing, from the room.

Outside, a horn blew. Gawroi was waiting and Ranmut sensed that if Felg were weak, Gawroi was strong. Together they were going to Balata 'kai after Matlin and there was nothing that he, Ranmut, could do to warn his friend that danger and possibly death was approaching across the sun-scorched sands.

THE WALLS GLOWED.

They had come a long way, Matlin and Haazahri, through tunnels carved in the soft, limey rock under the Balata 'kai ruins. The last signs for tourists had long-since vanished behind them and the way would have been totally dark but for the strangely glowing walls. Matlin went confidently at a dog-trot. Occasionally he stopped while Haazahri rested, and she saw the look on his face and never questioned him.

He knew where he was going, without knowing how he knew. But he had been this way before - seeking no, hiding. He had found something in the ruins, in an airtight box which had preserved it as if it had been left there yesterday and not five thousand years ago, and he had come this way to hide it, because it needed safe-keeping until he was ready for it

If he could only find it!

For he knew that it held the key to his memory. A blow on the head, the Arcturan physician Quotis had told him once, was not enough to destroy memory. The blow was merely a trigger. Unconsciously, the victim of amnesia wanted his memory destroyed, to forget something intolerable, to

hide something

To hide something. Prison. Dark, wet walls. Torture. Subtle psychological torture. He held out, but couldn't hold out much longer. The fire, the beams falling, the horrible burning. And gladly surrendering memory because, miraculously, he had not died. Surrendering memory to hide - - what lay before him in these caverns! One look, he thought as he ran, leaving Haazahri momentarily behind, and it will all come surging back like the sea at ebb tide. One look and I'll know not merely what it was I hid here, but the secrets of myself as well.

"Haazahri," he said.

Abruptly he stopped. He was here and the walls glowed and he could see but needed no vision for this.

"Haazahri," he said again, and she came up to him. "We're here, Haazahri," he said.

The passage looked like all the others. He'd led the way to it instinctively and knew that if he lost whatever instinct had guided his feet, they would be lost in this labyrinth forever. But it did not seem very important now. What was important had been hidden here, in this cavern.

"Where?" Haazahri asked. "Where is it, whatever you seek?"

He touched the wall near her

head and she heard a shifting, a grinding of heavy stones. Part of the wall swung slowly to one side, revealing a dark recess, a niche with walls that did not glow. Matlin thrust his hands within the niche and took out a large, heavy book with a black, unmarked cover. When he got it clear of the niche, he looked at it a moment in the glowing cavern light and his eyes grew big and round and the book dropped from his hands to the floor of the cavern. He stood there, clutching his head with his hands and Haazahri cried:

"What is it? What happened, Matlin?"

The pain of returning memory thrust at him like a sharp knife, but was not intolerable. He remembered. He remembered!

"Rhodes," he said in a dream. "My name is Rhodes. Phil Rhodes, and I'm an Earthman. They took me and they tortured me and I was going to break. I must have known it, subconsciously. So I welcomed amnesia, as the one way I could not reveal where I had hidden this. I had revealed once the fact that I'd found it, to Gawroi, before I told the Earth authorities. The Earth authorities still don't know, but when they do know, when they see what has been found"

"But what is it?" Haazahri

asked him.

HE STOOPED, picking up the book. "Earth doesn't want to dictate to your people, understand that. You are a sovereign people. But if in your sovereignty a small percentage of you have used lies and fabrications to enslave fifty generations of your people, and if Earth decides to do something about that"

"But what is it?"

With both hands, Rhodes held the big book over his head. His face shone with triumph and he said softly, his voice almost a whisper, "*The Book of the Dead*, Haazahri."

She looked at it, and at him. Then abruptly she fell to her knees and touched the floor with her face. "*The Book*," she said. "*The Book*? You mean that?"

"Haazahri, listen. You're important. You're very important. I knew it would be dangerous coming here. Maybe, instinctively, that's why I let you come with me. Because you're so important. You're a Kedaki, don't you see? With a Kedaki's reactions. I know about this *Book*. It's sacred. It's had five thousand years in hiding to become sacred. Even your rulers today probably didn't know where it was. Excerpts only, key passages out of context, remained from

the days the book had been hidden, remained to keep most of the Kedaki enslaved, chained to the lies of metempsychosis.

"I know, Haazahri. I know what it must be like. This book is the center of everything you believe. Your loves and dreams and hopes. Right now you must be telling yourself you ought to remain there, forever, your face in the dust before it. *The Book of the Dead*, Haazahri! Well, the *Book* is lies, do you understand? Lies! And I can prove it, the Earth scientists here on Kedak can prove it to all your people. Listen to me, Haazahri. This book doesn't explain the wonders of reincarnation, as you thought it might. No, Haazahri! Although, out of context, what material your leaders had might indicate that it did.

"This book is a book of instructions for the ruling classes of Kedak, through the unborn generations. The lies are explained, codified, systematized. There is no doubt, nothing left to interpretation. Keep them base, the book says. Keep them base and promise them a better life in their next incarnation, and they'll obey you. That's the cynical message of *The Book of the Dead*, Haazahri! Don't you see the difference between this and the true religions, in their many forms, of the other

worlds? Yes, good behavior is rewarded, and should be rewarded. But what is good behavior for the Kedaki lowborn? Good behavior is merely servitude, slavery. And the reward which the slave-masters hold out is one which, in the beginning, in this book, they did not even believe themselves. It's a fiction, Haazahri! And they say so. They say so here. Do you believe me?"

For a long time Haazahri did not answer. When she did, her voice was choked with sobs. "You . . . you're an Earthman. You brought me out here to . . . test me with *The Book* and see . . . not because you wanted me . . . not because you love me. Matlin, Matlin"

Rhodes said, "Stand up, Haazahri, and show me your face. Stand up, Haazahri, and let me kiss your tears. And don't cry, Haazahri. There isn't any reason to cry. Yes, I'm an Earthman. But I love you, Haazahri; I love you . . ."

She stood quickly and somehow he could sense that five thousand years of dogma and superstition were slipping away as, in time, with the passing of a generation perhaps, and with the understanding and patience of the rest of the galaxy, they would slip away for all of Kedak's peoples. She stood

up boldly in the face of *The Book*, but seemed shy. She said, "Then Matlin is no more?"

"I am Matlin and more than Matlin. Matlin was only a part of me. But you can call me Matlin, if you wish. All our lives."

"Do you wish?"

"It is not my name."

"Philrhodes?"

"It is customary," he said, smiling, "to use one half or the other."

"Phil? Phil? she breathed tremulously, and came into his arms. Then, after a while, he tucked *The Book of the Dead* under one arm and her hand under the other and started on the long trek back toward the sunshine.

DAYLIGHT was very bright, dazzling them.

"There they are!" a voice shouted, and Haazahri screamed:

"It's Felg!"

Rhodes said, "Watch the *Book*," and flung it to one side. They had come out into the daylight on the high limestone crag which jutted above the desert floor and Rhodes as yet could see no more than shadows against the fierce sun. The shadows came apart and one went toward Haazahri and the Book, and the other toward Rhodes. Tears sprang from Rhodes' eyes in the effort to see. Neither man was armed. It seemed right, some-

how, that they battle for the *Book* which had been born with the birth of a civilization, with their bare hands.

Then he was closing with Felg and heard Haazahri scream and knew the noise of their fighting would summon the guards, who would take the *Book* from him.

"My life!" screamed Felg hysterically. "You destroyed my life!"

The words meant much to Felg, but meant nothing to Rhodes. Felg was mad - - and strong with the strength of madness.

He forced Rhodes slowly back, and back meant toward the edge of the precipice and Rhodes got a quick vision of it as he was spun around, the world down there, far down, the tiny sand-car gleaming in the sun and the long stretches of sand and far away the huddle of stone structures that was Haatok gleaming in the sun. And then, still being forced back, he saw Haazahri, sprawled on the sand before one of the three great columns of the ruins of Balata 'kai. Blood trickled from her mouth and she was not moving. Of *The Book of the Dead* and Gawroi he saw nothing.

Then his own madness matched and surpassed Felg's own. Haazahri, he thought, Haazahri. His hands found Felg's throat and held

there a moment, but not long. He shifted them and got Felg's weight up and Felg screamed a thin sound in the high air and then he sent Felg's body hurtling down, the scream fading, over the precipice.

He did not wait to see it land, but ran to Haazahri. He touched her breast and she was warm, warm! her heart beating

"Haazahri," he murmured.

Her eyelids fluttered. "Go after him! Quickly, for he has *The Book*. I'll follow."

He whirled and sprinted for the broken, ruined staircase on the side of the cliff. Down it he went, tumbling, falling, sliding from rock-ledge to rock-ledge. The staircase, what was left of it, turned and twisted, and he could not see Gawroi below him.

When finally he hit the hot sands of the desert he saw Gawroi's figure ahead of him. Gawroi, running swiftly, and *The Book*! Heading for the sand-car, swift, swift - -

And if Gawroi won the race, a people would remain in bondage. How long? Another five thousand years?

Gawroi looked over his shoulder once, redoubled his efforts. The sand was hot and the wind whipped it at Rhodes' face, but he was closing the gap rapidly on the ponderous Gawroi. Still, there was no

time. The distance was too great Gawroi stumbled, rolled over, lost *The Book*, clutched it and began running again. Rhodes was closer, closer - -

And Gawroi flung himself into the sand-car.

The engine growled, caught. The wheels spun in the sand, tractionless at first. But soon their big treads gained traction, and the car leaped forward with a surge of power.

Defeat

But the car spun around, bore down on Rhodes. At the last moment he realized what Gawroi was attempting. He knew too much and Gawroi wanted to kill him.

Gawroi was going to run him down.

The car came screaming across the sand at him, whine of tires and whine of over-heated motor and Gawroi's grim face, growing, growing

Rhodes flung himself aside, then leaped. His hands caught the side of the open car, clung there even though it felt as if his arms would be wrenched from their sockets. He had a quick glimpse of a dot which was Haazahri working her way down the staircase on the side of the cliff and another - - a guard - - pursuing her. Then he pulled himself up into the sand-car and was grap-

pling with Gawroi.

THEY FOUGHT, and the wheel was forgotten, the car lurching from side to side across the sand. The cliff blurred ahead of them. How fast were they going? Seventy miles an hour? Eighty? If they struck at that speed

Gawroi was a man possessed. He didn't care. If the crash would destroy *The Book of the Dead*, destroy Rhodes, who knew of *The Book*, it was enough.

Rhodes pushed flank against flank in the narrow front seat of the open sand car. Gawroi's hands tore at his face, ripping skin and flesh. All Gawroi needed was a few seconds, and it would all be over. Gawroi, who was fighting for an idea, fighting to preserve a five thousand year lie. And Rhodes, who was fighting that a people might live, after five thousand years

Abruptly Gawroi tumbled from the car, clawing at air and screaming before he hit the sand at terrible speed, rolling and tumbling and coming to rest with his head at an impossible angle.

Then Rhodes was battling the car, and for a time which seemed extended over a yawning gap of infinity, he did not know if he would be able to bring it under

control in time. The base of the cliff loomed. He could not see above it. He stamped on the brake and still the cliff blurred at him. He felt himself flung forward . . .

And gazed at the wall of rock, two feet in front of the now motionless car.

In a daze, he watched Haazahri climb in beside him. Close by a guard was shouting something; in the car, Haazahri was saying something about his cut and bleeding face.

The guard would find Felg, his body broken from the fall; would find Gawroi, his neck broken. The guard would summon help.

But by that time, Rhodes knew, *The Book of the Dead* would be in safe hands. Ever since the earthquake, thieves had been looting Balata 'kai. They were thieves in

the eyes of the guard, only that. There was no reason for special pursuit and, in Gawroi's sand-car, they would reach Junction City.

And the pages of *The Book of the Dead* would be flung open for all the worlds to see. A generation might pass before the Kedaki could assume their rightful place in the civilized community of worlds, a generation in which the kind of thinking that had put Rhodes in a prison cell must be stamped out.

But in the end, the Kedaki would know freedom, and a mingling with the peoples of the other worlds.

He started the sand-car. Haazahri smiled at him, and kissed his bleeding face. And the love between him and this girl of the Kedaki was a symbol



Fourier's Remarkable Series

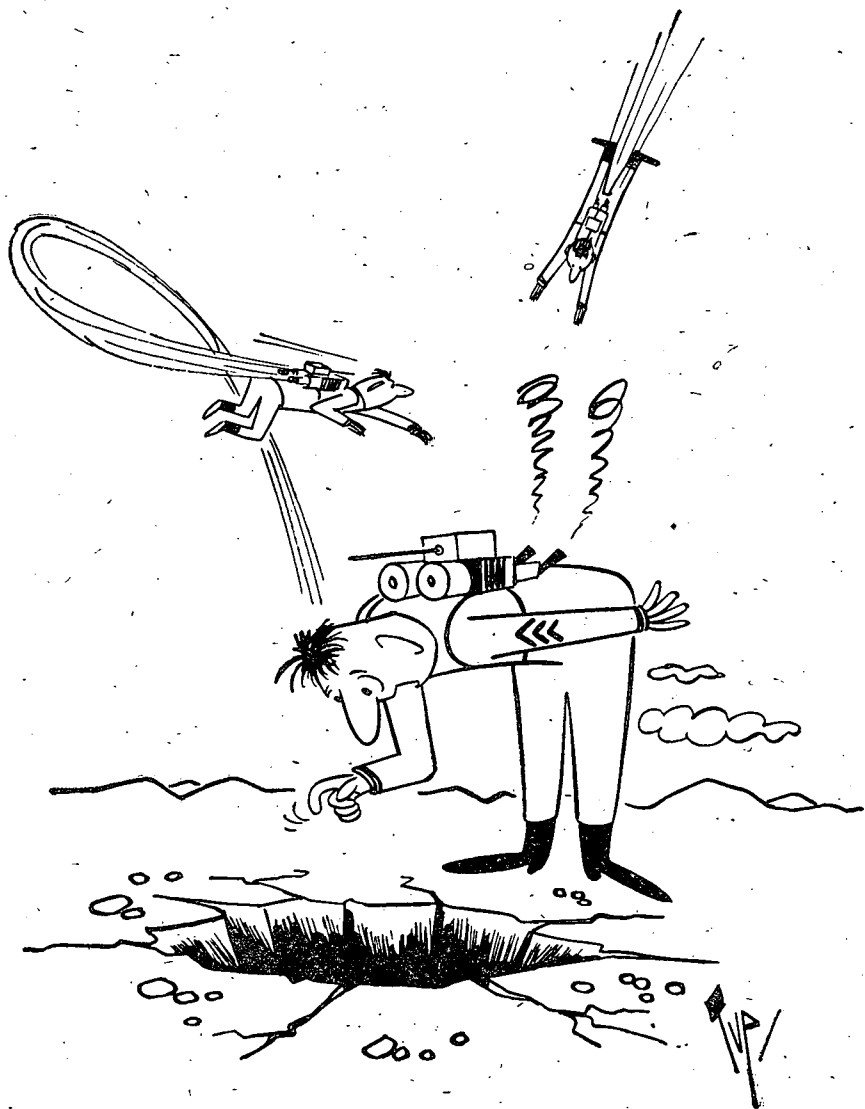


A CENTURY ago, a French genius discovered the fact that any periodic phenomenon can be described in mathematical terms by means of a series (infinite) of sines and cosines with suitable coefficients! . . .

Even so esoteric a thing as a sample of human speech or music, which you might think is compounded of the most random activity in the world, can be broken down in a trigonometric series with the properties previously described.

For applied science, this was one

of those "break-through" discoveries. Not a wheel turns, not a plane flies, nor a ship floats, but that somewhere in their make-up the Fourier's Series have appeared. Every time your car hits a bump, and you hear a solid thump, you can be sure the engineers used Fourier's work to make that satisfying thump. It is astonishing to reflect that a man sitting at a table can so change the world by electrical currents in the mass of his brain! A-sub zero, plus B-sub zero . . .



"Better practice up on those landings, Dobson."

We Run From The Hunted!

by

Darius John Granger

Running a hunting camp on Venus appeared to be a good deal. But like any business, you had to attract customers—and maybe a Wampan!

Illustrated by W. E. Terry

I DABBED at the nick on my jaw with a towel and said, "Ouch! Do you always have to read to me when I'm shaving?"

"Shaving," Harry Conger scoffed. "That's just it, shaving. Why can't you use dipilator, like ordinary people? What do you expect when you use an archaic razor?"

"I happen to like the feel of a razor."

"Well, it's the same with .30-.30 rifles instead of blasters," Harry said, still riding me. "The best the twenty-first century has to offer isn't good enough for you. Oh, no." He shoved the accumulation of unpaid bills in front of my face while I put the razor away and asked me, "What do you expect to pay these with — twentieth century coin of the realm?"

"O.K.," I said. "Lay off. So

we happen to be a little behind in a few payments."

"A few payments. We haven't had a customer yet, Gil. Not even one single, slightly jaded Earthman. No one."

"I still think 'Venus on the Half Shell' is a good idea," I said stubbornly.

Harry shook his head. "Good for the bill collectors. Good for the native bearers, who we've been feeding ever since we opened this joint. Good for the washed up big-game hunter living off what little fat there is in our land, but not good for us. If we only had one customer — just one . . ."

"Look out the window," I said, trying to be cheerful. "Venus. Raw. Primitive. Wild. Thirty million miles from civilization. A hunter's paradise. And we're the guys who can serve Venus up to our custo-



mers on the half shell. Hunting. Nature-watching. Just loafing. They can name it — we've got it."

"You mean we've had it," Harry said gloomily, shaking the fistful of bills. "Hell, Gil. It isn't only that. We haven't paid the bearers yet — not that they've had to bear anything. We haven't even paid

what's-his-name, the hunter. All he does is drink our whiskey. Why don't you admit it, Gil? Venus on the Half Shell is all washed up and we might as well go back to Earth while we still have the fare."

I grinned. "Do we still have the fare?"

"Well, if we sell some of your

antique firearms —”

“Sell them?” I cried. “But they’re the only way to hunt, Harry. You know that. They’re the real way to hunt. It’s no contest with a blaster — the local fauna don’t have a chance.”

“If we just had one customer.”

“A little while longer, Harry,” I pleaded. “You’re right. All we need is one customer, just to spread the word. We’ve got a virgin paradise for hunters here and —”

“I’ve heard that song before.”

“Well,” I said stubbornly, “it’s the truth.”

Just then someone knocked at the door. Harry and I shared a small cabin in the Venus on the Half Shell stockade. It wasn’t much of a cabin and it doubled as office and sleeping quarters. A knock on the door meant either the leader of the Venusians or Talbot Kramer, our has-been hunter who so far had been content to sit around drinking our whiskey.

I OPENED the door. It was Talbot Kramer, complete with week’s growth of beard, red-rimmed eyes, mouldily, swamp-smelling clothing and a man-sized scowl.

“Natives are through,” he said, and laughed. It may have meant a lot to me and Harry, but it meant nothing to him.

“Through?” I said. “What the

hell did they quit for?”

“Wompan,” Kramer said.

“Which?” Harry asked him.

“Wompan,” I repeated. I was excited. “Don’t you know what a Wompan is?”

“Not me,” Harry said. “Guess I was too busy studying unpaid bills. What’s a Wompan?”

“I quit too,” Talbot Kramer said suddenly. “You can’t expect a hunter to hang around when the bearers have quit on you. Not any-ways, with a Wompan around camp.”

“Will somebody please tell me,” Harry begged, “what a Wompan is?”

“I’ll take the swamp-buggy,” Kramer said, getting ready to go outside.

“The hell you will,” Harry and I both said together.

“Listen. You guys owe me some wages. I know you don’t have the cash, but I’m not complaining. I’ll take the swamp-buggy. Hell, it’s the only way out of here any-ways.”

“Some friend,” said Harry. “We won’t have any way out ourselves. We’ll be trapped in this damn swamp.”

“Trapped?” Kramer said incredulously. “Did you say trapped? It’s your place of business. There’s all the food you need—in the swamp. What’s your hurry to

leave? Besides, Mr. Gil Roberts here told himself: one of these days you're going to get a lot of rich customers coming in with their own spaceships. Well, got to be going now."

We went outside with him and over to the squat, ugly shape of the swamp-buggy. The treads were a foot deep in mud, a normal state of affairs for the swamp-buggy. It would run, though. It would take Talbot Kramer, ex big game hunter with a reputation and not much else, back to an outpost of civilization. And leave us without a guide if we ever got any customers.

"If you give us a little time," I said as Kramer climbed into the buggy through the roof hatch.

"Sorry, boys," he said, smelling of our liquor. "There was a letter for me on this week's mail rocket. A job in Kenya."

"Kenya, Africa, Earth?" I said, as if I were addressing a letter.

"That's right," Kramer said, lowering himself through the hatch. In a moment the swamp-buggy shuddered and made growling noises and shook itself clear of the mud. Out of habit, Harry and I waved as the buggy churned across a hundred feet of thick mud and moved ponderously toward the stockade gate. We stood there and watched the buggy fade into the green twilight swamps of Venus. It was very

hot out there in the open and Harry and I were drenched with sweat before the sound of the buggy's motor faded entirely.

"A hunter's paradise," Harry said.

"Aw, lay off," I told him.

Nearby, the buggy suddenly roared again, its motor racing.

"Is he coming back?" Harry asked hopefully.

"It wasn't the buggy," I said.

"Are you kidding. I'd know that motor anywhere. She needs a valve job like we need customers."

"That," I said without smiling, "was the Wompan."

"You're joking,"

"I wish I was," I said, closing the gate.

"It sounded just like the swamp-buggy."

"I know. Probably looks like it too — for now."

"Are you nuts?"

"Why do you think the natives ran away — and Kramer too. Wompan's deadly dangerous game."

"So stop smiling about it."

"I think it's funny," I said, "being left alone like this. You know what Wompan means in the Ringin dialect?"

Harry said he did not.

"It means, mimic."

"Oh," Harry said. He seemed relieved. "You mean it can imitate sounds — like the swamp-buggy's

motor?"

"Yeah," I said. "It can imitate sounds. And other things. It can look like a swamp-buggy or the video star Laura Laurene or maybe Talbot Kramer or even you. It's a mimic."

"What does it look like in real life?"

"No one ever saw one in real life. Only in real death."

"Very funny."

"No. I mean it, Harry. The Wompan assumes its own shape when it's killed. If it's killed because that's rare. Then it looks like a shapeless, jelly-like mass of protoplasm"

"Then what's so dangerous about it?"

"It can mime anything. A swamp-buggy. A man. A blaster."

"A blaster?"

"It can make like a blaster and blast the hell out of you," I said. "It can make like a beautiful woman and then strangle you when you're at your weakest. It can —"

"Did you lock the gate?" Harry asked. I felt a little sorry for him. Maybe I'm no Frank Buck, but Harry wasn't cut out for the frontier at all.

I told him I locked it. We went back to the cabin and had lunch out of cans. When we were working on dessert of canned peaches, the spaceship came down.

I BEAT Harry outside by three steps. The spaceship, a small sportster, sank, on its keel tubes in the mud. It would be a devil of a job getting her airborne again, but we would worry about that later.

I looked at Harry. Harry looked at me. "Customers?" I said in a small voice.

Harry said, "I don't believe it."

We stood with our backs to the Venus on the Half Shell sign running across the upper part of the cabin wall and waited. After a little while the small sportster's hatch swung out. We squinted at it through Venus' dazzling white sunless daylight and waited.

A head popped up. Big head with a mane of white hair and pink cheeks and some loose extra chins and a strong jaw and a small red flower of a mouth. Below the head was expensive sports clothing. Very expensive. All suede and linen and the latest hunting styles you see in the catalogues. He looked like a million bucks worth of something out of a Spaceman's magazine. He snapped his fingers and said, "Boy! Our bags."

Harry looked at me again. I looked at Harry. I placed the flat of my hand against the small of his back and pushed. He went stumbling across the mud toward the sportster spaceship. When he got there he managed to say, "I'll take your

bags, sir."

"I'll set up your tent, sir," I said.

"Tent?" the man in the sportster repeated. "Your classified ad in Spaceman's didn't say anything about a tent."

"That's Venus on the Half Shell," I said. "Outdoor living. Venus as Venus is to the natives. But it's perfectly safe, sir."

"We have a stockade, as you can see."

"I don't know about any tent or roughing it," the sportsman boomed.

"Well," I said.

"Game running good?" he asked.

"The best," I said. "A blind man could bag the legal limit of roupas and konees and jukets and ferzes in an afternoon."

"Better hope it takes longer'n that, son," the sportsman boomed again. "Didn't come all the way to Venus for an afternoon's walk in the woods."

"Walk in the woods," I said, nudging Harry who had come back staggering under the weight of several suitcases. "Walk in the woods."

"Yes?" the sportsman said.

"What I mean is, there's man-sized hunting around here. Really man-sized, sir."

"Daughter's with me," he said, wet-blanketing whatever sales

pitch I might have made. "Hope we haven't made a mistake. Could have gone on to Venus Joe's. I know Venus Joe's. But I liked your ad in Spaceman's. I always go by ads in Spaceman's. Know why?"

"No," I said, shaking my head.

"I'm Jason Woods Stevenson," he said, swinging his two hundred pounds of hard sportsman muscle down the hatch and walking athletically across the swamp toward me.

"Jason Woods Stevenson," I said, then suddenly ran forward to pump his hand vigorously. Jason Woods Stevenson! If he liked it here at Venus on the Half Shell, Harry and I had it made. Because Jason Woods Stevenson was the outdoor editor of Spaceman's magazine—and Sportsmen all over the solar system waited breathlessly each month for him to pontificate on some new out-of-the-way sportsman's paradise. If he passed on Venus on the Half Shell, we'd be swamped with business.

"Don't see any native trackers around," Jason W. Stevenson said after shaking my hand with a grip that almost broke the finger bones. "Have them outside?"

"Well, the truth is —" I said.

"Is what?"

"The trackers went back to their tribe."

"Went back? What about your

hunters? Are you boys the hunters too?"

I couldn't tell him about Talbot Kramer walking out on us. If I told him that, I knew he would climb right back into his sportster and head on to Venus Joe's. Venus Joe's which had started with fifty times the capital Harry and I had had, was doing well enough. But if Spaceman's magazine gave them a plug and said nothing about us, we really were through. I knew it and Harry coming back from the tent platform knew it and we didn't have to say it out loud.

"Yes," I told Mr. Stevenson. "We're the guides too."

"Experienced?"

"We know Venus as well as anyone," I said, which wasn't exactly a lie since no one, not even the Extra-terrestrial geographic Survey, had been able to draw an accurate map of Venus yet.

MR. STEVENSON seemed very doubtful. "Well, boys, I don't know. No hard feelings, you understand. If I was alone it might be different. But my daughter's here. She's not exactly a delicate item now, boys, but she's no big game hunter, either. If it was a cabin instead of a tent and if you had bearers and trackers—"

"You can have our cabin!" Harry cried desperately.

"Well, I don't know, boys."

I gave Harry one of those desperate stares. Harry returned it to me, saying without words that he had no further ideas either. I could see our last chance—a favorable write-up in Spaceman's magazine—going up in smoke. Mr. Stevenson started back toward his sportster and said,

"I'll say I stopped here on the way to Venus Joe's, boys. I'll say the place looked—ah, primitive. How's that? Primitive, I'll say. For real outdoorsmen."

"Damning with faint praise," Harry whispered to me fiercely. "Gil, you've got to do something."

I nodded. My head was suddenly as empty of ideas as the space between galaxies is empty of stars. I followed Mr. Stevenson back to the sportster and watched him boost himself up toward the hatch athletically and lower his two-hundred pounds in with the grace of a cat. When his head had disappeared but before the hatch banged shut I said:

"Wompan."

The head re-appeared. "What did you say, boy?"

"I said, Wompan."

"Here? Wompan here?"

"Yes, sir. Positively."

"I never caught a Wompan," Mr. Stevenson said. "Only three men ever have."

"That's right," I said.

"If I could write it up for Spaceman's magazine — assuming I catch one — we'd increase our circulation half a million copies."

"You'll catch one," I promised.

Jason Woods Stevenson beamed on me. "Oh, to hell with Spaceman's. I want to catch one because I never have. I've caught everything on Earth that the law lets you catch, boys. I was up at Venus Joe's last year and took the legal limit of everything but Wompan. Never even saw a Wompan. Boys," he said, "you've got yourself a customer."

He came down again and strode quickly across the quadrangle toward the wood platform which would serve as the foundation of his tent, keeping it above the ooze and mud. He was whistling cheerfully and he smiled again, the grin bisecting his face from ear to ear. If he had anything on his mind besides Wompan—it was Wompan skin. Whatever Wompan skin looked like.

"Aren't you forgetting something, sir?" Harry said.

"I don't think so, boys. Am I?"

Harry nodded. "Your daughter?" he said.

Mr. Stevenson's jaw dropped a foot. "The girl!" he cried. "I almost forgot about her." He wasn't smiling now. "If her mother ever learn-

ed I took her to a place like this, with absolutely no civilized conveniences . . ."

"But with wompan," I said.

He sighed. "Ginger!" he called. "You can come on out now, Ginger honey."

Harry and I waited for Ginger to make her appearance. After a decent interval she came gracefully out of the hatch. She was young and red-haired and pretty. She was built the way a girl ought to be built and she had a million dollar smile. The smile was for Harry Conger. Right away she liked Harry. She was nice enough to me in a spoiled little rich girl way, but Harry, was, as they say, her cup of tea. She went walking off with him toward the stockade to get her first lesson in Venusian fauna while Mr. Stevenson and I pitched their tent.

I was just as glad Ginger had decided Harry was for her, if either of us had to be. I had too much to think about. Such as Jason Woods Stevenson and Spaceman's magazine. Such as what a Wompan could or could not be expected to do when hunted. Such as our last chance to make good here on Venus. Let Harry have the lovelife, I'd try to keep Venus on the Half Shell solvent.

THAT NIGHT after supper Mr. Stevenson and Ginger turn-

ed in early in preparation for our first sally the next day. Harry gaped and gazed and wandered around the stockade, moonstruck.

"Hey, snap out it," I said.

"Lovely girl," he said.

"Lovely old man in charge of the outdoor section of Spaceman's magazine," I said.

"Got a smile could melt the night side of Pluto."

"Wompan," I said. "Remember?"

"You can handle it, Gil old boy."

"I don't know if both of us, working together as hard as we ever worked in our lives, can handle it. But we have to try. We have to be on our toes, Harry. Are you with me?"

"Did you see how Ginger's whole face lights up when she smiles?"

"Harry," I pleaded. "We have a book inside. It isn't much, but it tells everything anybody knows about a Wompan. What they do. How they kill people. How to capture them, if they can be captured. Harry, we're no hunters. Since Wompan is the solar system's most dangerous game, wouldn't you say that puts us at a slight disadvantage? Wouldn't you, Harry old boy?"

"She's really got a sense of humor too, Gil. For a rich kid, she's simple and unaffected and —"

"Let's go inside and look at that

Wompan book."

"I'll be along in a while." He waved at air. He wasn't looking at me. He wasn't thinking about Wompans or even Venus on the Half Shell. He was six thousand parsecs away and still running. I sighed and went inside. I burned the midnight oil learning what there was to learn about Wompans.

In the morning it was raining. Harry didn't seem to care. He had that moonstruck grin on his face and I was sure the Stevensons, father and daughter, noticed it. They were too polite to say anything about it, though, and Ginger Stevenson did seem friendly toward Harry.

"Do we try it in the rain?" Jason Woods Stevenson asked me. He wore a poncho which covered him .30-.30 rifle and all. He looked like a small tent with a head on top, but it was practical. Ginger wore a transparent raincoat which showed her nice sports clothing and nicer figure. It wasn't practical, but Ginger was a girl.

"Yes, sir," I said. "We try it in the rain."

And off we marched to find ourselves a Wompan.

WE TRIED it in the rain. We tried it in the dazzling white Venusian daylight. We tried at dawn and we tried at dusk. We

tried every way it said to try in the book, but we didn't find any Wompan.

Twelve days went by that way. Mr. Stevenson had already told us his limit was fourteen days. I got glummer and glummer, but not Harry. If I asked Harry what a Wompan was, he probably would have shrugged and said it wasn't important. Harry was still moonstruck and the nicest part of it from Harry's point of view was this: Ginger was moonstruck too.

Mr. Stevenson, though, grew desperate. Not about Ginger and Harry—he didn't seem to mind. About the Wompan. He wanted one. If you have ever known a sportsman after particular game, you will understand. He had to get a Wompan. I knew how he felt: we *had to* stay in business. No other animal would do and — although it wasn't our fault — I knew that if Mr. Stevenson didn't get himself a Wompan, Venus on the Half-Shell would not be saved by a big, many-paged spread in Spaceman's magazine.

On the thirteenth day, Mr. Stevenson said, "Going tomorrow. Early in the morning. This is our last try, Gil."

"I know that, sir," I said.

"Before we start, thought I'd kick over the sportster's engine. Don't want last minute trouble, you know."

"Yes, sir," I said. He climbed inside the small spaceship and kicked her over. He climbed down, satisfied. The rocket engine had purred like a kitten.

And purred again — outside the stockade!

I jumped about a mile and came down feeling light as a feather. There couldn't be another sportster in the vicinity. Certainly not. I knew it and so did Mr. Stevenson, who had studied our little book about the Wompan.

"Wompan," he said, looking at me.

I nodded and we went for the rifles.

Ginger had a short-barreled light-kicking Mannlicher, Harry and I carried Springfields and Mr. Stevenson had a big Marlin Magnum .375. We had enough firepower to stop anything the Venusian swamps offered unless something — such as a Wompan — stopped us first.

"Let's go out there," Mr. Stevenson said, loading a clip of ammo into the Marlin's magazine and ramming a single shell into the breech.

I led the way, followed single file by Mr. Stevenson, Ginger and Harry in that order. We went less than a hundred yards and could no longer see the stockade behind us. Venusian swamp jungle was like that. It was strangely quiet, though. We

noticed that at once — the usual small jungle noises were still; as if waiting, watching

"The Wompan," I whispered. "He's here, sir."

"How can you be sure?"

"Listen . . ."

"You mean the quiet?"

"The animals know he's here. Instinctively, they fear him. They won't make a sound because if they do, he'll have them. He can mime the sound of any life form and when he does that, he has them."

"He has them how?" Mr. Stevenson asked in a tight, anxious whisper.

"By pretending to be one of them and killing them when they don't expect it."

"I see. And we —"

"Keep on the lookout," I said. "And don't separate. As long as we stay together, sir, all four of us, we're safe."

We had come a couple of hundred yards from the stockade. Unless you knew the way back, though, it could have been a couple of hundred miles. Some of the bogs could be treacherous, too.

I WENT knee-deep in the muck and pulled my feet out. The mud made sucking sounds against the rubber of my boots. Something touched my shoulder and I whirled — but it was only Mr. Steven-

son.

"Where are they?" he said.

Ginger and Harry were gone.

I swore. I called Harry every name in the book, but it didn't help. Hell, he had had ample time to be alone with Ginger. Of all the fool stunts —

"You'd better find them, Roberts; and find them now," Mr. Stevenson said, his voice flat and cold. "That's my little girl he has out there."

I nodded grimly and we went back along the trail a slow step at a time, trying to pierce the green twilight gloom on either side. The jungle was very quiet — deadly quiet. Wompan quiet. The animals told us soundlessly. The Wompan was nearby.

"Harry?" I called.

"Can you chance it?" Mr. Stevenson whispered.

"I've got to."

We went back slowly, at a crawl. We covered twenty yards. Thirty. There was nothing.

"Harry," I called. "Harry?"

Mr. Stevenson's hand gripped my shoulder. He pointed. "What's that out there?"

I looked where he had pointed: Creepers and lianas and thick fern-brakes obscured my view. I couldn't see a thing.

"Out there," he said again.

I could see perhaps five yards, no

more. It was utterly silent. It was also hot and humid as it always is in the Venusian swamps. My khakis clung to me with sweat.

"I still can't see a thing," I said. He pointed a third time. I stared and saw nothing and was about to say so when something struck the side of my head just above the ear.

I staggered off into the fern-brake and sat down. I was groggy and I didn't know what had hit me. There still wasn't a sound in the jungle. When I brought my hand up to my ear and brought it away again, it was red and wet and glistening with blood. I turned around slowly, stiffly —

Jason Woods Stevenson stood there in the fern-brake. He looked gigantic. He lifted the big Marlin Magnum .375 over his head and brought it down, butt-first. I rolled over and away and the big rifle struck half a foot from my head. Several inches of the rifle were buried in the mud and I had time to stagger to my feet while Mr. Stevenson pulled it clear.

"What's the matter with you?" I roared. "What's the —"

He stood five feet from me. He swung the rifle around and pointed it at my chest.

There wasn't a sound — not a sound. It was like a nightmare . . .

I used my own rifle to knock his

aside as it went off. The Marlin Magnum packs a kick and he stumbled back a step. I went after him and when he pointed his rifle at me again and looked as if he would squeeze the trigger I had no choice. I swung my own rifle like a club and brought it down with savage force on his shoulder.

There was a sound and the sound said his shoulder was broken. He merely scowled and brought his rifle up again, broken shoulder and all, and then I knew.

I shot him. I poured the whole clip into him and the rifle kept kicking back against my shoulder, the stock slapping my cheek, and I didn't want to think. It was not until the last bullet went *whonking* home that he fell. It was a sound that only a hunter or a killer knows — the *whonk* of lead into flesh at close range. It is a horrible sound when what you're shooting at is a man.

Was a man.

Or looked like a man.

Because, as he fell, Jason Woods Stevenson changed. The features melted, became indistinct. The limbs fell in on themselves. The body grew big and round — bloated and somehow obscene. In seconds what had been a man was a shapeless, quivering, dying mass of protoplasm. A Wompan.

Then Harry Conger screamed.

It was a scream of sudden awareness and fear. It was worse for Harry than it was for me. Harry was falling in love with Ginger, and now —

I went crashing through the fern-brake, seeking them. I shouted at the top of my lungs now. "Harry! Harry!"

I found them when it was almost too late. Harry was down on his back, a dazed look on his face. There was a smear of blood across his face from ear to mouth. There was a strange look in his eyes.

Ginger Stevenson stood over him with the short-barrelled Mannlicher. I shot six times with a new clip before she fell. Harry climbed to his feet and stormed at me, raging like a mad-man. "You killed her!" he cried. "You—"

Then I made him turn around. He saw what was there and what was there was not and had never been Ginger. He sobbed once and I led him back to the stockade.

"**B**UT I DON'T get it," he said later. I had given him three stiff drinks and they had helped some, but only a little. Harry needed time to think and time to forget. "What happened to the Stevensons? To Ginger?"

"There weren't any Stevensons. No Ginger. Don't you remember they came right after we heard the

Wompan make like a swamp-bug-gy?"

"Yeah —"

"And when we got back there was no spaceship in the stockade, right?"

"Yeah—"

"It was the Wompan all along. There never was a Mr. Stevenson or his daughter."

"Yeah, but —"

"You're thinking the Wompan needs a model?"

"I guess so."

"It probably had one. The Stevensons last year at Venus Joe's. Isn't that what it said — as Mr. Stevenson?"

Harry agreed, but he didn't really care. He had fallen in love with a girl who didn't exist.

"Buck up," I said.

"It's all right for you to say."

"No. Buck up, will you?"

"What for? What the hell for?"

"Because Venus on the Half Shell has a chance now. Because we killed a Wompan. It's only the fourth one ever and we're going to get a lot of free publicity — which ought to make this place."

"Yeah, that's true," Harry said. But his heart wasn't in it.

"We'll take pictures," I said.

"We'll write it up and send in into Spaceman's magazine and we'll have it made. Sportsmen will be flocking here for a crack at Wom-

pans. No wait. I have a better idea. We'll take pictures and write it up and you'll deliver our story in person to Spaceman's magazine on Earth."

"Me? I just want to be alone, Gil. I don't feel like going anywhere."

I smiled. "Yes, you do. You'll deliver the pictures and the story

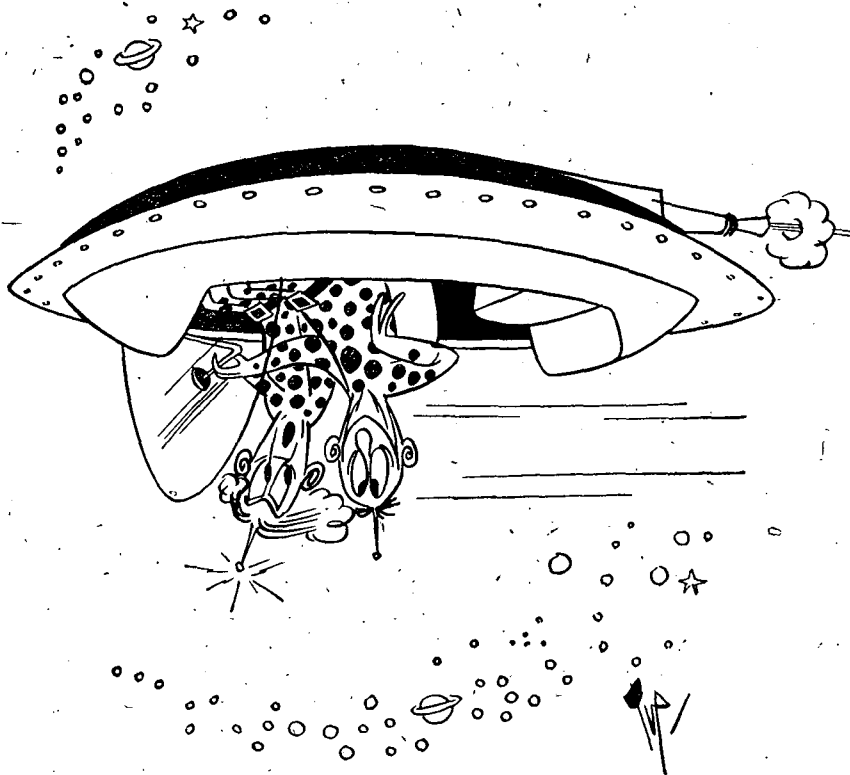
in person — to Spaceman's outdoor editor, who the Wompan saw at Venus Joe's last year. To Jason Woods Stevenson."

"Yeah," Harry said.

"And maybe you'll get to meet his daughter, Ginger."

"Yeah," Harry said again. But this time he was smiling.

THE END



"Now quit that fooling around . . . you know there's no safety belt in the back for mother!"

Lee Hayden had sent eleven men to their death in deep space. Now he wanted only to die himself. It was at this crucial point that he met —

The Man With The Golden Eyes

by

Alexander Blade

HE LAY IN the gutter. In his mouth was the taste of whiskey and defeat. There was mud and filth on his face, on his two-week shirt, on his rag-tag suit; and as the street and the buildings rippled and wavered before his eyes, a tape recorder in his mind played over and over:

You're through, Hayden - - - all washed up - - - this is the bottom - - - you can't go any lower - - - Lee Hayden - - - boy genius - - - all washed up - - - you made the trip in a hurry, son - - - right down from the top to the bottom in nothing flat - - - why don't you give up, why don't you kite off, you gutless wonder of the ages - - - too weak to live - - - too yellow to die - - -

On and on the tape played while along the street came the fastidious to step daintily around the wreck in the gutter; the callous to

grin and sneer; the timid to hurry by without looking.

Then a voice: "Can I help you?" "Go 'way."

A hand on his shoulder. The voice brisk, cheerful. "Come now - - - the gutter is no place for a man of your caliber."

Lee grunted and rolled over. Someone who knew him evidently; someone echoing the myth of his "brilliance". "I said get the hell - - -" He opened an eye. If this was an old friend, the man had gone out of memory. Plump, cheerful, rosy-faced, well-cut clothes. A man with an air of confidence.

And something more.

It was the something more that stopped Lee from swinging at the man's plump chin after allowing himself to be lifted to his feet. The man looked critically into Lee's face as the latter swayed. He took a snowy handkerchief from



his pocket. He wiped filth from Lee's face in the manner of one wiping the face of a child. "I think you need a drink, young fellow."

Lee grinned crookedly. "Now you're talkin'."

The plump man steered Lee down the street, around a corner, under a glittering marquee. An immaculate doorman glared with frosty eyes. His look of disgust partially sobered Lee. "Now wait a minute," Lee mumbled. After all, a man never lost *all* his pride.

He was drawing away, instinctively seeking shadows, when the doorman's eyes shifted to the plump man. They cleared instantly. He saluted, bowed, said "Good evening, Mr. Clifford."

"Good-evening, John. We need a snifter or two of your excellent scotch."

"Certainly, sir." The doorman opened the portal as though the Secretary of State were honoring the Lotus Room with his presence.

Lee was busy marveling as they crossed the hotel lobby, brushing close to hastily drawn-back mink coats and formal clothes. It was certainly time for the bouncer to appear. But the hostess at the door of the Lotus Room — a blonde dream wearing something that resembled a pink cloud — gave the plump man a look Lee felt should have been reserved

only for God.

"Mr. Clifford! What table would you like?"

Mr. Clifford smiled. "Good evening, my dear." He turned to Lee. "Mr. Hayden, this is Daphne - - - Mr. Lee Hayden, my dear."

Her eyes turned obediently to Lee and he was sober enough to note the complete absence of revulsion; only pity in her friendly, open gaze. He thanked her silently and thought: *Even a bum like me still has a little pride and sensitivity left.*

But a bum hides it behind grossness. Lee growled, "You got any decent liquor in this snob-joint?"

Snob-joint! Not so long ago he felt entirely at home in such places. Not so long ago? Huh! A thousand years or so.

Mr. Clifford said, "A quiet place, Daphne. Mr. Hayden and I want to talk."

"Hell with that noise. We wanna drink."

As they crossed the room, a man in formal clothes, obviously the manager, stepped aside and bowed deferentially to Mr. Clifford. The latter nodded pleasantly and eased Lee into a chair at a snowy table. The waiter was there instantly. Lee remained silent while Mr. Clifford ordered scotch. Then he could hold it in no longer.

"All right - - - what the hell is

all this?"

Mr. Clifford smiled easily. "You need a drink. Here we are."

"But why here - - - in this plush joint?"

"Why not. It's open for business. Would you prefer a reeking skid row dive?"

From anyone but Mr. Clifford, Lee thought, that would have been an insult. "I'd be more at home there," he mumbled.

"The greatest spacial flight theorist who ever lived? I think not." Clifford's voice was a trifle sharp and the *something* stood out again, holding back Lee's retort. At that moment the waiter arrived. He poured the drinks and Mr. Clifford motioned. The waiter set the bottle on the table and left.

Lee knocked off his drink. His belligerence returned. "If you're doing this for laughs, that's okay. I've got it coming. If you want an autograph - - - no soap. I couldn't hold a pencil."

Mr. Clifford picked up the bottle and poured a second drink for Lee. He had not touched his own. "So you failed," he said, pensively.

"Yes, I failed."

"So have others."

Lee sneered. "You can pass it off with such beautiful casualness. Do you realize eleven men were killed on that ship?"

"I know. And it seems to me

they faced their destiny with a lot more courage than you are facing yours."

"If I have to take a lecture with your liquor, I'd rather - - -"

"Certainly not. Have another."

Mr. Clifford poured and Lee had the grace to feel ashamed. "Look - - - I'm done - - - washed up - - - I'm at the bottom. Why should you - - - ?"

"On the bottom, yes. But sometimes people have to hit the bottom in order to ascend to the top."

Lee tossed off the third scotch. "Well I've hit bottom, that's for sure."

"You asked me why I brought you here, Mr. Hayden. That's the reason."

"What's the reason?"

"To see if you've really hit bottom."

"You make it sound important," Lee sneered.

"Believe me, it is."

"To my enemies?"

"No, not them alone. To your friends also - - - to all mankind."

"What kind of guff you handing me?"

"It is also important to you."

"Nothing's important to me."

Lee's head began swimming. And he knew - - - without seeing it or being able to prove it - - - that Mr. Clifford had drugged the last one.

He eyed Mr. Clifford's throat and

tried to raise his hands. Impossible . . .

Mr. Clifford, a blurred figure spinning in a whirlpool said, "Important, Mr. Hayden, because I think you are now ready to see the man with the golden eyes."

"The ma-man - - - wha' silly nonsense - - -"

Lee Hayden passed out.

HE AWOKE in softness. He opened his eyes and knew he was in bed. He was also aware of three other things - - - a horrible taste in his mouth - - - a splitting headache - - - and the fact he was not alone. He blinked and the form beside the bed sharpened from a blur and turned into a beautiful girl; a girl he felt he should know. Then he remembered. He had met her the previous night in the Lotus Room. She had been introduced to him as Daphne. She was still very beautiful; cool as a summer afternoon in the woods.

Though he had on completely adequate pajamas, Lee felt naked and ducked again behind his beligerence. "What the hell you doing here?"

She regarded him with an almost childlike seriousness. "Mr. Clifford thought you ought not to be alone when you awakened."

"Very thoughtful of him since he was the guy who put me under."

How long have you been here?"

"About two hours."

Filled with contempt for himself, Lee unconsciously used the device of redirecting it on the first handy person. Daphne was handy. His mouth twisted knowingly. "Sure you're not here for another reason?"

"What reason?"

"Trying to pick up a few bucks, maybe?"

The question in her eyes was obviously sincere, her look entirely innocent, and he knew she was not that kind of a girl.

Her expression changed only in that the question vanished. The innocence remained. Yet there was something about this last that caught Lee's attention. He tried to define it. The innocence of knowledge rather than that of ignorance? He wondered.

"If you want me to," Daphne said. "But no money would be required."

Stunned, Lee forgot his headache and slowly swung his feet to the floor. He studied her, the analytical mind that had made him a great scientist while still a young man now framing the questions.

"Why?"

"I do, not need money."

"I mean why are you willing to - - - ?"

"Because Mr. Clifford asked

that I serve you in any way I'm able."

"Why the rotten - - - !"

"Oh, no! Mr. Clifford is one of the Great Ones." There was reverence in her voice.

"You must be a fool! Trusting a man who would ask you to do a thing like that!"

"You're putting words in my mouth. Mr. Clifford did not mention sleeping with you. He only asked that I render any service possible."

"And you don't think that was included?"

"Possibly it was."

"And you respect a man who would *let* it be included?"

Daphne smiled, brilliantly, quietly. "Perhaps Mr. Clifford knew I would not be asked to render any such service."

"How could any man know that?"

"I told you. Mr. Clifford is one—"

"I know - - - I know. One of the Great Ones. What's that? A lodge of some kind?"

She pondered for a moment. "In a sense."

Suddenly Lee's decency took command. "I'm sorry - - - more sorry than I can say. Forgive me?"

She returned his smile. "There is nothing to forgive. Would you like some coffee?"

"That's an idea, but mainly, I want to talk."

"About what?"

"Who brought me here? Who - - -" he rubbed a hand across his chin. "Who cleaned me up and shaved me?"

"Mr. Clifford."

"Why?"

"I don't know. I imagine he had a reason."

"Where is he now?"

"I don't know. In China perhaps - - - South America - - - India."

Lee smiled wryly. "Okay - - - okay. Ask a foolish question, you get a foolish answer."

"I spoke the truth."

"What is he? A traveling salesman?"

Again Daphne considered with deep seriousness. "I suppose you could call him that?"

"When will he be back? I want a few more words with him."

"I doubt," Daphne said, "if you will ever see him again."

Lee tried to stand. He made a bad job of it. He swayed and sat down again. She was beside him instantly. "Your head?"

"My *two* heads."

"Perhaps I can help." Her fingers were cool on his skin; live, soothing, merciful. Lee closed his eyes and was enveloped in a wonderful sense of well-being. Then

he realized what seemed like a long time had been only a few moments. But his headache was gone.

HE TURNED on her sharply. "How did you do that?"

"It's very simple." Daphne went quickly to the phone and ordered coffee and orange juice. She put down the receiver, faced Lee, and said, "You wanted to talk?"

"Yes. I have one big fat question. Why?"

"Why?"

"Don't evade—please. You know what I mean. I was lying drunk in the gutter. This man picked me up and put me here. Why?"

"Perhaps you are more important to humanity than you realize."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because Mr. Clifford concerns himself with humanity."

Lee felt a quick exasperation. Daphne seemed perfectly willing to answer any question he asked, but her answers were about as enlightening as midnight in a dark closet. He sought a different tack. "Tell me about these Great Ones."

"I'm afraid I can't."

"Why not?"

"Because I know so little about them."

"They don't tell you much, then?"

"I am unworthy of knowing

much. As yet I am hardly an initiate."

A waiter brought the coffee and departed. Daphne poured from the silver pot. "Is there anything else I can do?"

"I think you've done enough. And I'm grateful. I haven't got the least idea as to reasons - - - but I'm grateful."

"I'll be at the Lotus Room if you want me."

Daphne picked up her coat, smiled at Lee, and started toward the door. As she extended her hand toward the knob, Lee said, "Just one more thing."

She turned. "Yes?"

"Before I passed out, there was something this Clifford said. Something about my being ready to meet the man with the golden eyes. What kind of gibberish was that?"

Daphne hesitated. For the first time, she seemed at a loss for an answer.

Lee asked, "Was it just my imagination?"

"No."

"What did he mean?"

"Just what he said, I'm sure."

Lee smothered his exasperation. "All right - - - then who is the man with the golden eyes?"

Daphne regarded Lee with a sort of impersonal fondness. "Someone I'm sure you will meet very, very

soon."

She left before Lee could get in another question. He sat on the edge of the bed staring moodily at his coffee cup. "She cured my headache," he muttered, "but I've got a hunch this guy with the golden eyes is going to bring it right back again . . ."

THERE WAS a complete new wardrobe on a chair by the bed, but Lee — loaded down as he was by unanswered questions — refused to wonder where it had come from. As he showered, towelled and dressed, his thoughts were centered upon Mr. Clifford to the exclusion of all else.

Mr. Clifford. Who was he? Why had he done all this? A devious plot of International Electronics to get one Lee Hayden back on his feet and on the job again? Lee thought not. Two points stood against this idea. First, International had definitely charged him off. Second, granted they were having a last try, their procedure would in no way resemble the mad pattern of Mr. Clifford.

Then what lay behind this? Was it the amused gesture of a dilettante philanthropist? No. There was something about this Clifford that put him a cut above that. He was no idle operator. There was

purpose involved. But what purpose? Daphne had told him he would probably never see Mr. Clifford again. So how could he ever make any sense out of what had transpired in the last few hours?

As Lee snatched up his key and headed for the lobby, he told himself, *She put her hands on my forehead and the headache was gone instantly. Or did I really have a headache?*

The clerk nodded deferentially. Lee faced him behind his old shield of belligerence. "My name is Lee Hayden."

"I know, sir."

"I was in room 1106."

The clerk nodded.

"Who rented it for me?"

"Why, Mr. Clifford, sir. I thought you knew."

"I just wanted to find out if you knew." Lee tossed down his key. "I'm going out."

"Certainly, sir."

"Well?"

"Well, what, sir?"

"The bill. Don't people pay to stay here — or is it a charity institution?"

"Oh, no sir. We are not a charity institution. But your bill was paid for by —"

"I know—by Mr. Clifford."

Lee scowled and strode out into the street.

HE WALKED from the hotel straight to the nearest bar. He knocked off a double bourbon, neat, and let it warm the lining of his stomach. It felt good. He set down his glass and gestured to the barkeep. Then he was looking into the refilled glass and making no move to lift it. A moment later he was out in the street, realizing this was the first time in eighteen months that he'd walked away from a drink.

It was no reformation, though; merely a temporary diversion of his mind from a prime objective; that of drinking himself to death; that of blotting from his brain the picture of eleven men dying horribly as the ship he had designed shivered and buckled and collapsed in deep space.

Not even a temporary respite, because the horrible vision of his own shortcomings — his own failure — was still there. But how could he have known? Neither he nor anyone else could possibly have been aware of the true conditions encountered out there. Theories and abstracts were fine; almost enough to go on. But not quite. The payoff is always in the doing. Otherwise, test pilots would not command fabulous salaries to risk their necks on the first try-out. But eleven men! Snuffed out because Lee Hayden's word had

been taken. Eleven young men.

And here he was, many hours later — back in his room with the bottle on the table ready to blot out the dream — the nightmare of their final agony — that ripped and tore at him everytime he closed his eyes.

Still half sober, he fell into bed and began living it again, -tasting the horror, feeling his own flesh grind, his own bones break; living their deaths over just as he had from that first moment when he'd gotten word of the disaster; the last message they'd sent from space.

He awoke in a pool of sweat and realized where he was. He snatched at the bottle, hit it, knocked it off the table. He watched the liquor slop out onto the carpet. He sobbed.

Then, wide-awake — with the stench of fresh whiskey in his nostrils — he saw the man with the golden eyes.

OR AT LEAST he thought he was awake. And even as it happened, there was a certainty in his mind.

This is no dream.

He was standing, apparently unobserved, in a huge cave; a strange, fabulous place and the wonder of it caught at his breath and made his heart race.

The cave was high in the side of a mountain. It was as though a huge knife had cut horizontally into solid rock and sliced out a chunk nine feet thick, fifty feet wide, and one hundred feet deep. The walls and ceiling of the cave were of burnished black stone, the floor laid with thick, silken carpet.

Light came soft and shadowless from somewhere, seemingly sourceless, and from the outer lip of the cave where Lee stood, he could see a full, yellow moon riding the night-sky.

The scene - - - above and below - - - was one of ecstasy; an overwhelming sensation swept through Lee, something he had never known before. At his feet was a sheer drop of ten thousand feet straight down the face of the mountain to a green valley below. A silver river threaded delicately through a valley hemmed in by towering snow-covered giants. The air was like sharp wine and something within Lee said, *I am not dreaming. I know I am here. I can feel the air in my lungs. I can feel a new life vibrating through my flesh. I am still drunk but now it's different. Now I'm drunk from a feeling of complete freedom. I know for the first time that I have never been really alive.*

He raised his eyes to the stars

above - - - steel-blue stars in the clear air. *I know too, that these are the Himalaya mountains — that this is the roof of the world.*

He turned and looked into the cave. A man stood nearby. He wore a white gown, yet his form was not hidden; a magnificent six-foot body supported a head of majestic proportions. The man's face was a magnet and Lee would never know whether or not he was handsome. He would remember that the mouth was firm, the nose straight, the eyes dark and arresting. They were not golden, yet the light that came from them, illuminating the face that would forever leave an impression of shining gold.

The man with the golden eyes. Lee said, "I am a stranger. How did I get here? Why have I come?"

The man moved forward and stood looking out across the mountains. But he appeared to be seeing much further - - - into infinity itself. He said nothing.

"Please. Why am I here?"

The man paid no attention. He finished regarding whatever had interested him and turned back into the cave.

"Please."

At this word, the man stopped and turned. He looked at Lee for a long moment. Then he said, "Be

very careful. A fall from this height would be fatal." With that he moved back into the cave, and . . .

Lee Hayden was lying in a sweat-soaked bed.

But his awakening was different from any he had ever known. Later, trying to analyze this, he concluded he had awakened from not having been asleep; awakened as it were, from an awakened state. When he tried to rationalize this contradiction he could not do so. Neither could he change it.

But he sprang from the bed with a wordless cry and was on his knees clawing for the whiskey bottle. There was more than a double shot left. He gulped it down. He dropped the bottle and sobbed. Then all strength went out of him and he collapsed into sleep there on the whiskey-soaked carpet . . .

DAPHNE LED Lee to a table and asked, "What would you like to drink?"

"Nothing. Do you have a little time?"

"Of course." She sat down opposite him.

"I had a - - - well, a dream last night."

"A dream?"

His eyes narrowed slightly. "You ask that as a question. Don't you think it was a dream?"

"I would have no way of know-

ing."

"I don't think that's quite true."

"You feel I would deceive you then?"

"No, just that we're talking on different planes perhaps. I think you know far more than you reveal. You knew Mr. Clifford told me I was ready to see the man with the golden eyes."

"Yes."

"I saw him."

She was regarding him with the abstract warmth he had seen in her eyes before. "What do you wish of me?"

"I - - - I don't know. I came here to - - -"

Daphne reached out suddenly and laid her hand on his. "All I can tell you is this, Lee. Neither I nor Mr. Clifford nor anyone else can help you anymore. All that can be done for you has been done. From here you rise or fall by what's inside you."

"Then you're resigning your job?" Lee spoke lightly, but with a touch of bitterness underneath.

"What job?"

"Mr. Clifford told you to serve me in any way you could."

"That still goes, Lee. What do you want?"

"You're a very beautiful girl. What do you suppose I want? You."

"You mean you're in love with

me?"

"Does it seem so incredible?"

She smiled at him. "You're just exploring — hunting — aren't you? Still trying to get answers to questions. You know that as a man and woman we have nothing for each other?"

He was trying to look behind her eyes. "Yes, I know it. Where is your love, Daphne?"

"The same place yours is. We're looking for the same thing."

"But can't we hunt for it hand in hand?"

"No. Each must seek in his own way."

"But you have a clearer idea of what it is we seek than I?"

"Perhaps - - perhaps not. Who can say?"

Lee got up and extended his hand. "Thanks. You've been very good to me."

"You're going now?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"To find the man with the golden eyes."

"Where is he?"

"He's somewhere in the high Himalayas. That wasn't a dream I had. I was there. I saw him."

"But this time it will be different. The way is uncharted. There are no road maps."

"I can only do my best. I may fail. I may never find him."

There was tenderness in her eyes. "I think you will. I'm very sure you will . . ."

"Goodbye, Daphne."

Lee walked the streets until dawn and as he reentered his room it was to pack a bag and check his cash resources. And it was as if he had become two men walking in one skin; two minds housed in one brain. One mind was that of a fanatic; the other, reasonable and cautious.

The reasonable man said, *You're a fool. They lock up people like you. Too much whiskey. Too much of a mental beating. You've gone off your rocker.*

The fanatic said, *He's in the Himalaya's. I'm going to find him. So that's where I'm going.*

The reasonable man said, *You're nuts.*

The fanatic said, *Granted, but this nut's heading for India.*

LEE FLEW EAST. Seven days later he was in Karachi. He scarcely looked at the place, his eyes turning northward toward Baluchistan; eastward toward Lucknow and Delhi. In that direction, the roof of the world was a faint blue haze on the horizon of his imagination. His face was grim and cold. Seven days had changed him. The fanatic rode high, now. The reasonable man was a dim

spector lurking uneasily in the background.

He changed his money into the coin of the realm and took a train for Delhi. He rode with strange people, scarcely aware of their presence.

He discovered that traveling from Karachi to Delhi on the railroad of India was a frustrating and confusing business. He began counting his money carefully; hoarding it; haggling. When he arrived in Delhi, he was a lean, bearded stranger with a fever behind his eyes.

But there was a glory in his heart because of a new and sharpened sensitivity. He was alone and friendless and almost without funds, yet he had never before felt so able, so competent.

While stalking the streets of Delhi looking for a cheap hotel, he heard a cheerful voice calling his name. He turned. The voice came from a car at the curb. A brand new Ford convertible. Lee spoke casually. "How are you, Mr. Clifford?"

The meeting was as strange and illogical as all the other events and incidents of Lee's life had been since he had lain in a New York City gutter.

Mr. Clifford smiled warmly. "Mr. Hayden — I'm glad to see you."

"A real surprise," Lee said.

"How have you been?"

"Fine — just fine."

"Taking a little trip, I see."

"Yes. Getting around a little. Seeing the world."

A mad conversation in the light of the questions he had for Mr. Clifford; and the things Mr. Clifford could logically have had to tell him.

But a new and exhilarating independence had sprung up in Lee Hayden. He realized he was not the same man Clifford had rescued and drugged in New York.

"You really get around," Lee said.

"Oh, yes. I have a lot to do."

Lee turned away.

"See you again sometime."

"I hope so - - - and by the way, there's a man you might like to talk to. I think you'd feel free to ask him questions. Perhaps he'd feel free to answer."

"Good - - - where can I find him?"

Mr. Clifford considered for a moment, then said, "I'm going in that direction. Jump in."

Lee obeyed, throwing his rucksack in the back seat - - - the rucksack he'd acquired, along with cash, for his expensive pigskin two-suit.

Mr. Clifford tooled the Ford carefully through the streets and

out onto the dusty, country road leading northeast. No word was spoken for many miles; until Lee extended a hand toward the horizon. "Beautiful mountains."

"The Himalayas. The roof of the world."

"No mountains on earth quite like them."

"Rugged, aren't they? - - - and beautiful."

"By the way, how is Daphne?"

"In excellent health, I'm sure. I haven't seen her for a long time."

Mr. Clifford turned off the road and pulled up beside a parked Cadillac sedan. Nearby was a small hut and a tiny enclosure. Within the enclosure, a goat munched on dry, colorless hay.

In front of the hut a man sat cross-legged. He was very old and thin. His skin was burned black by the sun and he wore only a white sheet wound loosely around his body. His head was completely hairless and he looked as though he had sat there for years without moving a muscle.

A woman sat on the ground in front of him. The sun was just setting and its rays played on her magnificent white hair; upon the wealth of color in her dress - - - a dress, Lee estimated, that must have cost several hundred dollars. Yet she sat in the dust before this

ancient Indian and hung upon his every word.

"We will wait," Mr. Clifford said.

After a while, the woman got to her feet and approached the Cadillac. Lee saw her beautiful, calm, unlined face, and he was struck by her resemblance to Daphne. She looked nothing like Daphne in either face nor figure, yet they had in common an arresting mystic beauty that seemed to come from within.

The woman smiled at Mr. Clifford who smiled back. No word was said. After she backed the car out and swung into the road, Mr. Clifford said, "Wait, please," and got out of the car. He approached the cross-legged man and sat down in the dust.

They talked for a long time and when Mr. Clifford got up and returned to the car, it was after dusk, and the heavens over India were filled with great flaming stars.

"I'll leave you now," Mr. Clifford said. "The man by the hut is known only as Abat Krishna. You may approach and talk to him."

"Thank you."

Clifford hesitated before getting in behind the wheel. His eyes turned toward the dark horizon.

"There is danger ahead for you."

"I am not afraid."

"Perhaps you will find what you

want. Perhaps you will die."

"I will find my way. You said I might question this man?"

"You may ask him anything you like. Goodbye."

Mr. Clifford started the motor and drove away. The goat sent a bleat of farewell through the star-lit darkness.

LEE WENT to the hut and sat down in front of Abat Krishna. The Indian regarded the heavens and remained silent.

"Who," Lee asked, "are the Great Ones?"

"There are many names for the group. They have been called the Great White Brotherhood. They have been referred to as the Chosen Ones. But that name is misleading in that none are really chosen. The way is open to all. Nothing is given, all is earned."

"Is Mr. Clifford a Great One?"

"Possibly. I do not know."

"Was it sheer chance that he found me in the gutter and lifted me up?"

"Nothing is sheer chance, my son. The most casual movement of an insect's antenna is carefully planned."

"What do the Great Ones do?"

"Their duty - - - which is as simple and ordinary to them as ours is to us."

"How may they be recognized?"

"That would be difficult."

"Where may one find a Great One?"

"Anywhere. Wherever their duties and their destinies call them."

"What, exactly, is a Great One?"

"A child of God who, through his own efforts, has prepared himself - - - or herself - - - for greater understanding of God's laws; for deeper awareness. With this of course, comes greater responsibilities, and greater achievements."

"I have heard that there are men in India - - -"

"Why- necessarily India?"

"- - - that there are men on this earth who can walk on water; who can pass through solid substances. Is there any truth in that?"

"I do not know. I have never met such a person."

"Do you believe that such persons exist?"

"The answer to that is difficult. Do you have complete understanding of all natural laws? All God's laws?"

"No. I have very little knowledge of them."

"Then I might put it this way: A man walking through solid matter would seem to you to be violating a natural law. But a trick of elementary sleight-of-hand - - - the vanishing of a coin - - - could appear the same to a child. So perhaps

the answer lies in comparatively greater understanding."

Lee regarded Abat Krishna. Abat Krishna calmly regarded the heavens. Lee said, "But the *greatest* Great One of all is the man with the golden eyes. Am I correct?"

"You are correct."

"I seek him."

"A worthy endeavor. I have sought him for many years."

"But I know where he is."

"You are indeed fortunate."

"I saw him in what many might consider a dream. But I know it was not a dream!"

"I'm sure it was not."

"I saw him in a cave high in one of the Himalaya Mountains."

"There are many mountains in the chain."

"I shall find the right one."

"I'm sure you shall."

Lee leaned forward. "You said you seek him too. Then come with me."

"I cannot. Each man follows his own destiny."

"And yours—?"

"To sit and study the heavens until I find myself worthy of lowering my eyes."

"A strange destiny."

"All destinies are strange."

"I am selfish enough to ask your help."

"I have none to give."

"No advice?"

"One inconsequential bit perhaps. To the east is a settlement called Almora. Trading caravans leave from there for the higher country - - - and across."

"Thank you."

"The goat is ready to be milked. Refresh yourself before you go . . ."

NOW ALMORA was far behind.

And far behind was the trading caravan and the men who took his money and left him to die many days later in the cold foothills. But he had not died.

And far behind were the more kindly natives of the colder, windier places who clothed and fed him, treating him as a mad child rather than a man. He left them and they shrugged and let him go. As though perhaps they had seen other mad ones go before him.

And he had gone on - - - higher and higher - - - driven by an ever-increasing fever in an ever thinner and more emaciated body. Until, it seemed, he could go no further. He lay for days in a small cave with the icy winds snarling at the entrance while he wrestled with two fevers - - - one in his spirit and one flaming through his flesh and his bones.

He called in his agony to the man with the golden eyes, but there was no response. An age

passed; an age of semiconsciousness; another; then he slept.

When he awoke the physical fever was gone and the spiritual fever had changed to something else; something he had never before known. He lay for a long time, studying it, analyzing it.

Then I knew.

He knew and he smiled and gōt up and walked out of the cave, a pale wraith of a wasted man; little more than an apparition that appeared hardly able to stand. Yet he felt stronger and happier than ever before in his life. His happiness came from the knowledge that his new strength and understanding had not been given him; that he had earned it; that he had paid bit by bit with his suffering.

He told himself. I was not helped. Only guided. I could have died. No one protected me.

And now I understand.

He left the cave and climbed, sure-footed, to a higher plateau. Here there was no snow. Only wind-swept rock and meager soil. He walked until he came to his destination.

It was another hut; this one of sod and rock to stand against the wind and the cold. A man sat in the doorway, swathed in furs. His skin was dark from the weather, but it was impossible to call him

either old or young.

Lee did not even dwell on these points. He only knew. . . . from his new perception, from the new mysticism he had earned with his suffering. . . . that the hut and the man would be there; that no chance had brought him; that all had been arranged as surely as sunrise.

He stood before the man and raised his eyes. "The mountains are high."

"The mountains are always high. No man ever reaches the summit of his mountain."

"I know that now."

"Nor even a cave halfway up the mountain's side."

"That I know too. I also know. . . ."

"That the man with the golden eyes. . . .?"

"Is myself. He was there within me back in my room half a world away; not in a cave in the Himalayas."

"The man with the golden eyes, my son, is every man. . . . the symbol of perfection every man carries in his heart. It is the seeking after this perfection that is life: The man with the golden eyes is the image of what every man has the power to be."

"I know these things now, but tell me. Why was it given to me to see the image so clearly?"

"Each man who reaches the

depths is given a choice. On one hand is death; on the other, the long climb back."

"But there was more in my case. I was given help. I was guided."

"Your footsteps may have been directed but you had to make the climb yourself. You could always have given up and died along the way."

"But why was I guided?"

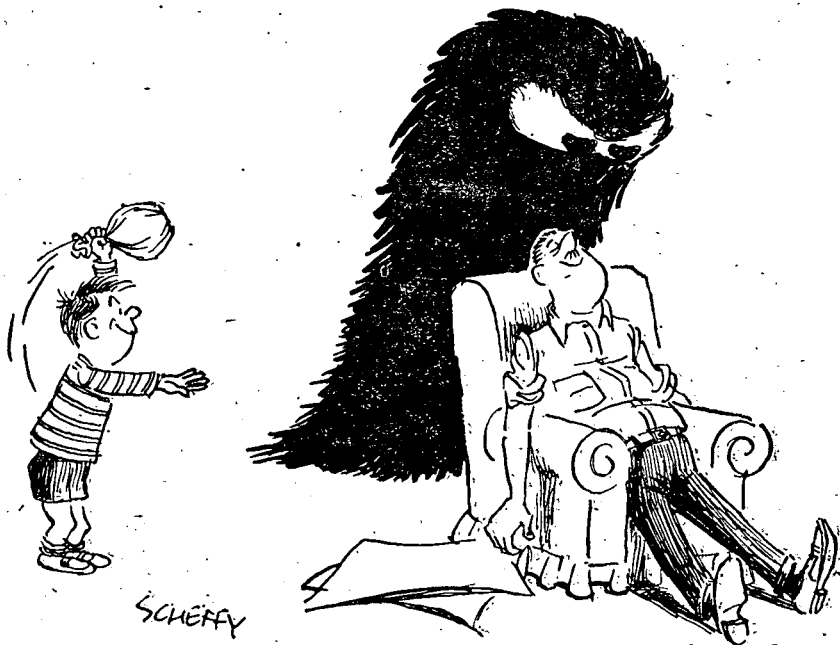
"There is a reason for everything; and there are Great Ones aware of great necessities. You

tried to invade outer space and failed. Perhaps the time now demands that space be conquered, and thus your talents are precious to the cosmic scheme."

"There is so much I must learn. So far I must go in so little time. To conquer space, a man must first conquer himself."

The furred figure smiled. "Good. Now you are ready to learn. Sit down my son. The teaching must begin."

THE END





Conducted by Robert Bloch

THE YEAR is still young as these lines are being written, and I haven't seen the article yet. But it will come, never fear.

It always comes, every year, with the infallibility of a swallow returning to Capistrano or disappearing down an editor's throat.

Those of you who have inhabited the merry microcosm of science-fiction fandom for a while will know what article I mean. But you neo-fans will be surprised - - and perhaps shocked - - when you read it. And that's precisely the reason why I'd like to anticipate the article in advance this year.

The article I refer to will appear in one of the fanzines, and it will be couched in strong and scathing language. It will be written by a fan seething with sarcastic indignation, and will take the form of an announcement that this fan is leaving fandom because he has "grown

up".

Now this matter of dropping out of fandom is neither unusual nor reprehensible. Tastes and habits do change, and personal circumstances frequently arise which make active participation in a hobby unfeasible. Every year, certain fans quietly take their leave, while new fans arrive and pitch their tents on the sites vacated by the silently departing Arabs.

But the person who will write the article I have in mind is neither silent nor Arabian. He is bound and determined that his passing marks the world's end, and he intends to make sure that the ending comes with a big bang and a loud whimper.

He isn't content to go his way in peace. He must first compose a personal manifesto, to the effect that he has seen the Error of his Ways and is Repenting. With

a truly religious fervor, he will infer that fandom is made up of Miserable Sinners: that its interests and occupations are callow, shallow, juvenile, imbecile. He will cite chapter and verse in an effort to bolster up his case; he will piously lament that "presumably intelligent people" still "waste their time" editing or contributing to fanzines, reading science-fiction, attending meetings or conventions. He will urge them to awake to Reality and the Big World Outside, and generously offer them a glimpse of his mature outlook in contrast to the petty preoccupations of fandom.

Often he will "confess" his errors in precisely the same manner as an ex-Communist will upon embracing Democracy — or, for that matter, like a practicing Communist who recants a now outmoded "party line" of ideology.

Big deal.

Now I'm in no position to state just how many people have been influenced in the past by such dramatic denunciations and departures. I suspect very few fans have actually abandoned their hobby because of the urgings of the disaffected.

But since it's obvious enough that we don't live in a world of utter black-and-white values, sometimes the remarks of a departing fan do call our attention to a bit of tattle-tale gray in the field. And it's possible that many of us, in our more sober and reflective moments, allow a few doubts to creep in concerning the values and benefits of fandom as a hobby.

We listen to the criticism and reflect that some of it seems to

have a basis in truth. There *are* some offbeat characters in fandom (present company not necessarily excepted). There have been some regrettable incidents and irregularities. Petty feuds are not unknown. Some fans are fanatic and seemingly harbor delusions of grandeur concerning the importance of the field and/or their position in it — witness a fan over in Northern Ireland who actually thinks *he* is Walt Willis himself!

And certainly, as a self-constituted minority group, fans are constantly subject to external pressure and ridicule from the self-constituted majority groups who insist *their* hobbies are more important because more people share them. This "mathematical proof" reasoning may or may not echo in our psyches when doubt creeps in.

But before we bow to the dictates of the majority, and of the article-writer who has made this Great Discovery that fandom is only a trivial hobby, perhaps we ought to consider a few of the benefits accruing to fan-activity.

Elsewhere I have had occasion to dwell at length (and rent-free, too!) on the notion that science-fiction fandom is a valuable source of contact in making friends. No need to sharpen the point; most of us who have spent time in the field continue to do so because we *have* made friends. We enjoy sharing our hobby, our interests, and even our social life with people of similar congenial tastes. The delight of communication, on an international basis, is available to the fan editor, contributor or correspondent.

But such an argument, of course,

won't satisfy the disenchanted critic. He will continue to insist, in effect, that fandom is merely a glorified waste of time. He won't listen to sentimental opinions. He wants facts and figures.

So be it.

Exactly what material benefit can a fan derive from his participation in fandom?

Let's look at the record.

If you harbor any ambition to become a writer, illustrator, editor or publisher, there is no easier avenue of approach to your goal than the field of science-fiction fandom.

Since the day when teen-age fan Charles D. Hornig was plucked directly from fannish ranks and plunked into the editorial seat of a professional science-fiction magazine, these "success stories" abound.

Without any pretense of being comprehensive or all-inclusive in my listing, allow me to offer a few examples that come readily to mind.

AMONGST writers, we find the names of James E. Blish, who hectographed (in a manner to bring howls of horror from today's conscientious editors) a crude little fanzine when in his early teens. We can list young Poul Anderson, juvenile Henry Kuttner - - who used to write letters to WEIRD TALES - - and a kid named Damon Knight. Let's not forget little Freddie Pohl, or a gal named Judy Zissman, who now writes under the name of Judith Merril. And then there's Fritz Leiber, Joe Gibson, and Cyril Kornbluth, and a brash young punk, who used to hang around the LASF, whose name was Brad-

bury. Artists like Hannes Bok and Virgil Finlay were fans long before they began their professional careers. Forrest Ackerman, Julius Schwartz, Oscar J. Friend, are remembered as fans in the days when they couldn't possibly hope to become agents, since they were unable to figure out 10% of any given amount.

A writer like Wilson Tucker, with a dozen books to his credit, is still better-known today as Bob Tucker in fannish circles. And there are a host of transitional figures - - fans, who are currently establishing themselves as professional writers with mounting sales. A few easily brought to awareness in this connection: Jim Harmon, Bob Silverberg, Vernon L. McCain, Dean A. Grennell, Dave Mason, Marion Zimmer Bradley, the immortal Lou Tabakow, and Harlan Ellison - - who has also written under a pen-name.

Editors? Robert W. Lowndes and Donald Wollheim were prominent early fans. Larry Shaw, Donald A. Wollheim, Raymond A. Palmer, Beatrice Mahaffey, Sam Moskowitz, Jerry Bixby and (let's face it, shall we?) Bill Hamling. All of them cut their eye-teeth on fanactivity.

Fantasy and science-fiction publishers? Lloyd Eshbach, Melvin Korshak, Martin Greenberg - publishing the works of such fans-turned-pro as E. E. Evans, Basil Wells, Frank Robinson. The name of Ted Dikty comes to mind here; as does that of Judy May Dikty. And then there's Oliver Saari, Earl Kemp, Chad Oliver, Les Cole, Lester del Rey; and just about everybody in England seems to turn up sooner or

later in their magazines. Willis, Shaw, Harris, Bulmer, Tubb, Campbell, Turner—right on down the line, they go from fanactivity to writing and editing and illustrating and publishing in natural sequence and progression.

And if we extend our concept of fanactivity to include avid and continuous readers in the medium, we'll have to let just about every other "big name" in the field into our category. Almost without exception, they've been readers from 'way back; and if they live, or lived, in metropolitan areas they were regular attendees at fan club meetings and conventions too.

No doubt about it: there *are* benefits to be found in this hobby of ours, and material benefits at that. Of course, there is no pretense made that one can necessarily make a fortune in the field, but on the other hand, how much cash does the average baseball fan or wrestling devotee ever derive from pursuing his hobby? And where is the Arthur C. Clarke of the bowling world - - a field in which one cannot even hope to make pin-money?

It is difficult to name a single established writer, editor or regular contributor to the professional science fiction magazines who has not done his or her share of "fanning" at one time or another - - and derived benefits therefrom. Possibly the sole exception is our good friend "Doc" Smith. He was not a fan when he was young, because there were no fanzines in those days - - printing hadn't been invented yet. But you probably know he makes up for that lack today, and is a devoted convention attendee.

So much for the record. In itself it offers eloquent rebuttal to the claims that science-fiction fandom offers nothing of material value to the hobbyist. And as for *other*, more important values, you can answer that question for yourself.

It goes without saying that not every fan is going to establish a career as a professional - - nor, in the majority of instances, is such a goal even contemplated. But the opportunity is there. And so is the pleasure and reward of participation for its own sake.

AND NOW, let's look at a few fanzines.

The Indiana Science Fiction Association ISFA (Ed. McNulty, 5645 N. Winthrop, Indianapolis, Ind.; frequency and price indefinite) and Indiana talent is well-represented in a big 48-page issue. The present offering contains just about everything one might expect to find in a "typical" fanzine - - fiction, poetry, an article "defending" fandom, an art folio, cartoons, letter column, book and movie reviews, and a Convention report. The latter, by Thomas Stratton, is somewhat more earthbound than the usual Stratospheric soarings into whimsy, but it's a good job. An all-round magazine like this makes a good "sampler" for anyone who hasn't yet investigated the phenomenon of fan publication. Material is good, bad, and indifferent: diversification is the strong point.

Another recent Indiana product is YANDRO (Robert and Juanita Coulson, 407½ E. 6th St., North Manchester, Ind.: 5c, 12/50c,

monthly). The current issue is special, priced at a dime, because it contains 38 pages plus a Science Fiction Calendar Section with artwork headings. As is the case with ISFA, the lineup is a virtual Who's Hoosier of Indiana Fandom. A few foreigners such as Les Hoffman manage to muscle in, but this is not in itself apt to provoke strong objections from the readers. YANDRO inclines heavily towards fan-fiction, satirical and burlesque in nature.

WAD No. 2 (Curtis D. Janke, 1612 S. 7th St., Sheboygan, Wis.: no subscriptions, no charge, no harsh laxatives) is a terrific compendium of gags, grotesqueries, just plain queries, and just plain grotes. Editor Janke doffs the sock and buskin long enough to tee off on uninformed critics of Dianetics and overinformed critics of jazz. This 'zine contains something for almost all lovers of humorous prose, and even poetry-lovers will get their WADSworth.

MUZZY No. 8 (Claude Hall, 2214 San Antonio, Austin, Tex.: 25c, irreg.) has a lineup which includes Dave English, Nancy Share, Wilkie Conner, Garth Bentley - - and a 4,000 word bit of fiction by Hal Annas. The loveable old editor is still playing post-office with the Post Office, and this magazine is definitely not recommended, therefore, to children under 5 years of age. The review section on fan-mags is considerably larger and more ambitious than the one you are reading here.

NANDU emanates from Nan Gerding, Box 484, Roseville, Illinois: the 12th issue consists of 29 pages, and you'll have to see it

in order to understand just how that's possible. Actually, this issue is worth seeing just because of a section called HUBBUB HORIZONTAL: This time around there's a symposium on ethics featuring John Brunner, the editress, Dean A. Grennell, Gertrude M. Carr, and Philip Jose Farmer. NANDU is a SAPSine, with no price listed, but you might drop Nan a line and try your luck.

Buyers, sellers, traders will be interested in the NFFF TRADER (Ray Schaffer, Jr., 4541 Third St NW, Canton, O.: 10c) which appears bi-monthly and is one of the magazines taking over where the now defunct KAYMAR TRADER left off. This is not so much a fanzine as it is a collector's item.

From Donald Laverty, P. O. Box 164, Milford (Pike County) Pennsylvania, comes his SNIDE. Although only a 4-page hectographed sheet, SNIDE - - with a cover that is extremely Nast-y - - contains an article by Stuart Fleming which will be of vital interest to every decent-minded fan. It's an exposure of the almost incredible treachery of a notorious "fake-fan" who recently attempted to undermine the very foundations of all fandom. The revelation of this Benedict Arnold in our midst is a signal service. It is suggested that interested parties write directly to Mr. Laverty for full details, rather than wait for CONFIDENTIAL. I do not know Mr. Laverty, but I'm sure he worked like a demon on this; and as for Stuart Fleming, he is a knight in shining armor.

In striking contrast is FRONTIER, the Official Bulletin of the Society for the Advancement of

Space Travel (Dale R. Smith, 3001 Kyle Ave., Minneapolis 22, Minn.: 6/\$3.00). The mere fact that the editor chooses to live on a street named after Dave Kyle is sufficient evidence of his serious intent. And a perusal of the contents affords ample confirmation. Here we have what is indeed a magazine for the space-ialist in the field: no cartoons, no interlineations, no fannish prattle - - but a great deal to interest the arm-chair astrogaters. Apparently a membership roster is being built up with the serious purpose of offering the latest available data on problems of space-travel, and FRONTIER is therefore recommended to readers whose *metier* is meteors and who seek new light on the satellite.

MEANWHILE, down in the Confederacy, the Carolina Science Fiction Society is bringing out TRANSURANIC (Al Alexander, 2216 Croydon Rd., Charlotte, N. C.: 5c, bi-weekly). This is a news-zine, an official club organ - - in the non-Jurgenesque sense of the term - - and is presently beating the drums for the Second Southeastern Convention, to be held March 3rd and 4th, in Charlotte, N. C. By the time this item reaches print, the Convention will probably be a *fait accompli* (French for "You've had it, boy!") but anyone interested in the doings of Rebel Fandom will find a complete report in this publication. Oddly enough, two renegade turncoat Yankees - - Robert A. Madle and Lynn Hickman - - are prime movers in the organization.

From England comes TRIODE

(Eric Bentcliffe, Terry Jeeves: 58, Sharrard Grove, Intake, Sheffield 12 15c). This is an irregular - - some say highly irregular - - publication, and it can be obtained through American representative Dale R. Smith (for whose address, see FRONTIER, above). It features the aforementioned Smith in a frivolous vein, demonstrating his versatility. Contributors such as John Berry and Mal Ashworth slit a few veins of their own, and the result is highly pleasing to readers with a degenerate sense of humor, such as myself. John Berry's series of articles bids fair to do for Belfast what James Joyce did for Dublin. To say nothing of *to*.

From the other side of the world comes ETHERLINE (Ian J. Crozier for subs at \$1 for 13 issues, contact J. Ben Stark, 290 Kenyon Ave. Berkeley-4, Calif.) There's an Eastern U. S. A. representative too, but I don't dare stretch those parentheses to the breaking-point because Editor Hamling prints this magazine with old type left over from the defunct CAPTAIN BILLY'S WHIZZ-BANG.

ETHERLINE is in its contents a surprising indication of how U. S. science fiction has infiltrated everywhere: it leads off with a bibliography of the work of Clifford D. Simak, goes on to review British and American prozines in their foreign editions and then - - sure enough! - - comes the inevitable article on films by Forrest J Ackerman.

How he does it I don't pretend to know, but for the past twenty years or more, Forrest J Ackerman has had articles on films in virtually every foreign fanzine

ever published. He has been translated into Urdu, Coptic, Gaelic, and the various dialects of the Esquimaux: he has bantered in Ibentu, Japed in Japanese, and italicized in Italian. I have read his Hollywood reports in Esperanto, and I'm sure his description of Marilyn Monroe's anatomy would touch the reader in Braille. This boy gets around.

American fandom is the subject of a further report by Alan C. Elms: indeed, if there's one thing wrong with ETHERLINE it is the dearth of actual Australian news.

ECLIPSE comes our way (Ray Thompson, 410 South 4th Street, Norfolk, Nebraska: 10c monthly) and the 14th issue is a combination of interesting letterzine and editorial opinion. Editor Thompson has put a lot of conscientious effort into improving his output and the results are self-apparent, and worth your consideration.

The 20th issue of OOPSLA! (Gregg Calkins, 2878 E. Morgan Drive, Salt Lake City, Utah: irregular, 15c 4/50c) is as welcome as its predecessors - - which, to this reviewer is very welcome indeed. Featuring such names as Lee Hoffman, Phyllis Economou and John Berry, it is further distinguished by Vernon McCain's column, THE MARK OF MCCAIN. His reasoned evaluation of (you'll pardon the expression, Hamling) GALAXY draws my complete admiration and partial agreement, and it's material of this sort which helps make OOPSLA! a top magazine. Twenty-five cents to the editor will put you down for a copy of a forthcoming special 50-page version, complete, of Walt Willis's journey

to the USA. Anyone who has read installments of this saga in OOPSLA! or QUANDRY will want this revised and definitive, text - - the autobiographical account of how an ignorant, unlettered foreigner made his boorish way across the country and learned humility, kindness, and the virtues of malted milks. Admirers of the Willis style (such as Willis) will undoubtedly treasure this work: the rest of fandom ought to buy it too. If you planned to spend 25c this year on fanning, by all means invest it with Calkins for this coming epic.

OOPSLA!, by the way, carries a note from Richard Geis, further confirming the passing of PSYCHOTIC and SF REVIEW. The many readers (myself included) who have come to admire these publications and their exceptionally able editor have reason to mourn; let's hope Dick will at least find a showcase for his talents in the pages of other fanzines.

The spring issue of MAGNITUDE (Ralph Stapenhorst, Jr., 409 W. Lexington Dr., Glendale, Calif: quarterly, 10c or 6/50c) appears in 20-page offset format. The lead article is an adaptation of a highly amusing speech given at the LASF Fanquet by writer Ed M. Clinton, Jr. Incidentally, MAGNITUDE has some fine illustrations: I was impressed by the cover, which seems to be a picture of a broken steering-wheel after a bad accident. I'm not sure about this, because it might be something highly scientific instead. However I am reasonably certain that the alleged movie still on page 20 is actually a pho-

to of two Canadian fans about to take off in their hot-rod. (I mention no names here, but their initials are Boyd Raeburn and Gerald Steward).

The latter has just produced GASP! No. 7, and this magazine is distributed quarterly to a "select few" in the FAPA and SAPS organization plus some disorganized fans. The cover depicts a hot-rod, appropriately enough under the circumstances, and the contents are up to the usual Stewardian standard. If you want to try your luck at wheedling a copy, Gerry's address is 166 McRoberts Avenue, Toronto 10, Ontario, Canada.

The third issue of ISM (Sandy Rosin, Grey Gables, Co-op, 163 West College Street, Oberlin, Ohio: irregular, no price) is at hand, and Miss Rosin is coming along. As is John Hitchcock with his UMBRA, from 15 Arbutus Avenue, Baltimore, Md., which goes at 10c a copy or 3 for a quarter. Wetzell, Jan Jensen and Larry Stark are featured this time around.

The new January INSIDE (Ron Smith, 611 West 114th Street, New York 25, 5 for \$1) is distinguished by Cindy Smith's able direction and - - to my vulgar way of thinking - - by an outrageously uproarious collaboration between Randall Garrett and Lin Carter. If you have been following Sam Moskowitz's articles on the decline of science-fiction and his earnest plea for the restoration of a "sense of wonder" in the stories, then this satire is certainly a "must". And if you're anywhere within 3,000 miles of New Jersey you can probably open your windows and hear Moskowitz laughing; for I'm cer-

tain he'll appreciate the rib, too. It's a masterly job.

From Gnome Press, 80 E. 11th St., New York 3, N. Y., comes the second issue of SCIENCE FICTION WORLD, edited by BOB TUCKER and Robert Bloch. Priced at 10c, this is a printed 4-pager consisting of news, views, and reviews - - plus in this instance a preview of an editorial by H-r-c-e G-ld, editor of G-l-xy (Hamling won't let me use names here.) This magazine is actually designed for widespread national distribution in bookstores across the nation, in hopes of interesting readers of science fiction who have not yet learned about fandom. Editor Tucker does his usual sprightly job, with some slight assistance from his stooge.

In hopes that this issue hits the stands before the end of June, I'm enclosing news of the 1956 WESTERCON. This regional fan-convention is scheduled for June 30th and July 1st, at the Hotel Leamington, Oakland, California. Membership is \$1, which entitles you to stand in the lobby and make faces at Forrest J Ackerman. Guest of Honor will be Richard Matheson, who needs no introduction - - but will probably get one anyway from banquet to a master Anthony B-ch-er (See? I told you Hamling won't let me mention such names).

Send your \$1 to WESTERCON - - 432 23rd Avenue, Oakland, California. And if you manage to get out there, please tell everybody "hello" for me.

And now, as the sun sinks in the west, we say farewell to beautiful Fandom, Land of Ten Thousand Schmoes. See you next issue!

— Robert Bloch

TRAITOR'S CHOICE

by

Paul W. Fairman

**Kendall had a difficult decision to make;
if he defied the aliens Clare faced a horrible
death; if he complied a whole planet must die!**

THE PHONOVISION bell rang. Reed Kendall reached for the switch, not taking his eyes off the blueprint that lay on his desk. He spoke absently. "Yes?"

The reply came sharp and cold. "I'd suggest you stop what you're doing and pay attention to me."

Kendall raised his head and looked at the screen. The image that faced him was that of a man; a tall man in ordinary street clothes, but wearing an odd silver mask over his face.

Kendall made no effort to hide his annoyance. This was no time for jokes. Some lab comedian with time on his hands. "Now listen here! I'm busy and I'm in no mood to - - -"

"Shut up!"

The tone was sharp, brutal, contemptuous. It stiffened Ken-

dall, then eased him slowly back into his chair. "What do you want?"

"That's better."

"Take that absurd mask off."

"I'll leave it on."

"Then get this over with. Tell me what you want!"

"It will take a few minutes. Go over and lock your door."

"I'll do no such thing!"

"I said - - - go over and lock your door."

Their eyes clashed; Kendall's frank, indignant, accusing; the stranger's dark and menacing in the holes of the mask.

"Very well." Kendall crossed the room and stood for a moment with his back to the phonovision screen. This man meant business. But what could be the nature of that business? Kendall's thoughts went of course to the top secret



material he had access to. The defense of the world lay within the boundaries of the Canadian Flats Ordnance Research Project. But safely so.

The Centaurians were as eager to get these secrets as - - - well, as had been the Russians during the first phase of the atomic era when

the world was divided into two frightened and belligerent camps. Strange, Kendall thought, that he should think of that period. The world had long since become one frightened and belligerent camp but the problem of survival had heightened as advanced science had opened the starways.

"I said - - - lock the door!"

Kendall complied. As he returned to his desk, he sensed the man was smiling behind his mask. What was he? A Centaurian? Either that or a Terran. Certainly not a Venusian unless he was standing on a box.

"Sit down."

"All right. Let's get on with it."

"In my own good time. First, let me sympathize with you on your love for your wife."

"What sort of idiocy are you talking about?"

The man ignored the question. "You are unique in that love, Mr. Kendall. We conducted a telepathic survey of every married scientist in this project. And only one psych-pattern was suited to our purpose."

Kendall scowled. "I think you are enjoying this - - - but I'm not. And believe me, you'll live to regret it."

"We were fortunate in finding you, Mr. Kendall - - - the one man here who would be incapable of allowing his wife to die horribly if he could prevent it - - - no matter what the cost."

A vague fear coupled with a chill was seeping through Kendall's brain. "Say what you've come to say and get it over with!"

"I'm doing just that. We have

your wife, Kendall. We got her at ten o'clock this morning."

"Impossible! Our security is foolproof. No person has ever been kidnapped from any world defense project!"

"Never before, but let me tell you why. Because such a hostage would have been of little value. Terran scientists and defense personnel have been psychologically conditioned to the point of fanaticism. We have never before discovered a Terran scientist who would put his wife or any other loved one before his loyalty to Terra."

"And what makes you think I will?"

"Our tests are absolute. But if we are wrong it will be unfortunate for only one person. Your wife."

KENDALL thought of Clare, trying the while to keep his panic from showing through. Blonde, beautiful Clare - - - the one person who really made his life worth living. Clare. As he worked at this brutal, tedious defense business, he did not work for the defense of Terra, though that idea and its psychological drive was ever in his conscious mind. He worked to keep Clare safe and now he realized the stark fact; realized it as he cursed the Centaurians

and their devilish-extrasensory penetration; cursed this masked devil for being right.

Shocked out of wariness, he allowed these thoughts to spill through his conscious mind; then he caught himself and threw up the blank mental wall all defense people were taught to use.

But not until the man chuckled behind his mask and said, "I agree on all counts, but you have to admit that we clocked you perfectly, Mr. Kendall. The risk we took in kidnapping your wife was well worthwhile."

"On the contrary. One life is of little consequence."

"I'm sorry you feel that way," the man said with mocking lightness in his voice. "Let me describe the manner in which your wife will die. First we'll strip her nak - - -"

"What is it you're after?" Kendall snapped.

The man's chuckle was even more pronounced. "You're right of course in surmising I'm a Centaurian, and you're quite familiar with the way our cold war works - - - how the balance of power has been maintained these last hundred years."

"The balance is tipped in our favor."

"Of course, but we now intend - - - through you - - - to remedy

that situation. You people are very ingenious in that you invent a total destruction-type weapon and then turn right around and conceive an absolute defense against it. We do the same, of course, or try to, but we find ourselves at all times slightly behind you. A sad situation for we Centaurians, don't you think, Mr. Kendall?"

"Your chances of ever balancing us are remote."

"Not so. Let me explain. Our great hope lies in obtaining the plans of your latest projectile. I think you call it *Willy Seven*."

"I know of no such plans." *Clare, lying defenseless against the obscene tortures of these soulless animals . . .*

"Let's not waste time with lies, Mr. Kendall. You have been working on the project."

"The defense against *Willy Seven* - - -"

"- - - Is not perfected!" The Centaurian leaned forward and snapped out the words in triumph. "It can't possibly be ready for use in less than six months because the projectile involved a difficult combination of lethal - - - germs and subsonic vibrations. The toughest you ever tackled."

A DEEP sickness clawed at Kendall's stomach. The Centaurian had hit upon the truth

while still evidently unaware of Terran defense procedure. He did not seem to know that the development of an offensive weapon was never allowed to proceed faster than the development of a defense against it, the theory being two-fold; that defense was the most important element concerned and that defense against our own weapons would probably function as safeguards against those of Centaurian origination.

Also, the possibility of theft had been foreseen. To have the plans of a nondefensible weapon stolen would mark the end of Terra. But in the case of *Willy Seven*, the defensive unit had involved such problems that the defensive half of the project had lagged.

... They will give her drugs to sensitize the flesh and nerves of her body until her sufferings will be those of ten people crowded into one skin ...

"We want *Willy Seven*, Mr. Kendall. We want it now."

"I don't have access to the plans."

The eyes were again baleful behind the mask. "Let's not waste time. You know very well we didn't launch this project only to leave such important angles to chance."

"But getting them out - - -"

"You will take microfilms of the

plans within the next twenty-four hours. We left a thumb-nail-sized camera under your wife's pillow in case you have need of it."

"You thought of everything, didn't you?" Kendall said. "Everything except the one all-important point."

"What is that?"

"My wife could never be returned to me because there would be no place to return her - - - after you destroy this globe."

"We are not fools. That phase of it has been well-planned. "You will apply for a three-day vacation and meet our ship at a location in Yellowstone National Park. Your wife is already on her way to our planet. You will follow her in a second ship - - - you and the plans. After the annihilation of your world is accomplished, you will not find us ungrateful. You will both be sent to Venus to live out the rest of your lives in ease."

"I have only your word for that."

"It is enough."

And Kendall knew of course, that it was. The Centaurians would keep their word, mainly because breaking it after they had obtained their objective would gain them nothing. They would keep their word because their propaganda department would insist.

"And now," the Centaurian said,

"I have stayed on this circuit long enough. Soon it will cause suspicion. A note will be delivered to you giving the time and place of our meeting in Yellowstone."

KENDALL finished out his hours. And this was not strange. No need to go out hunting Clare. A waste of energy to rush home looking for her. She would not be home. She was on her way to a far-distant and hostile planet where - - - unless he followed orders - - - she would scream out her life in agony unbearable to even contemplate.

The Centaurian was right. Kendall had not the iron will to allow this even though a dozen planets were on the block. He worked like a man in a dream and then drove slowly from Plant Nine along ten miles of winding road to the residential section reserved for scientists.

The house was dark. He went through the back door and stood alone in the kitchen. The dishes had been done. The place was spick and span. He knew the other rooms would be the same; beds made, floors swept. But Clare was gone.

Numbly, he wondered how they had accomplished it. He could have found out; checked at the gate and probably discovered by what ruse they had lured Clare

out. No doubt forgery was involved; cleverly faked phone calls perhaps; even accomplished actors masquerading as guards or officials.

But it didn't matter really. Not now. Finding out would only satisfy curiosity. No end would be served.

Kendall went into the living room and sat down in the dark and lit a cigarette. Two hours later, the tray beside him was filled with butts and his decision had been made.

They would get their prints. Clare must not suffer. He got up and went into the bedroom and found the tiny camera under Clare's pillow . . .

He filled out a requisition the next morning and took it to his Section Chief, the kindly gray-haired senior scientist who was responsible for the work of twenty-five juniors. He read the requisition and his eyes widened a trifle. "Hmmm. The stats on the *Willy Seven* basic equations? I thought you were working on *Nike Twelve*, Kendall."

"I am sir. But I've got a hunch the *Willy* coordinates might get me over a nasty little hump. There is a similiarity."

"Perhaps you're right." The Chief signed the permit without further objection.

There was a numbed sickness in Kendall as he rode the elevator down to the file vaults and showed his permit to three sets of guards before he was admitted. Alone in the long, narrow aisles where the greatest secrets of Ter-ran defense and offense were housed, he walked like a man in a dream to the file he wanted and swiftly took his pictures. Then placing the tiny camera into the cuff of his trousers, he went back to Plant Nine . . .

THE THREE-DAY leave was granted without question, Kendall having over two months due him. The Chief was delighted that he did not ask for more. "Where do you plan on going, Kendall?"

"Out in the air somewhere. The Yellowstone, maybe. Some quiet place to clear my mind."

"A good idea. Wife going with you?"

"As a matter of fact, she went on ahead."

Kendall watched the Chief closely for reaction. Only a slight raising of eyebrows. After all, Clare could have gotten a permit without the Chief's knowledge even if Kendall's story had been true.

"Have a good time and come back full of enthusiasm."

Kendall replied in kind and went

home and sat down facing the phonovision screen. It remained blank for three hours. Kendall did not move. He smoked cigarettes and waited. Finally the signal sounded and he snapped it on.

The man in the mask. The voice that now associated itself in Kendall's mind with nausea. "You have the film?"

"Yes."

"Excellent. The leave?"

"Yes."

"You will leave the project immediately and - - -"

"Not so fast."

"I beg pardon?"

"I said, not so fast. I'm not satisfied with the arrangements."

The voice turned cold. "The arrangements are not yours to question. You - - -"

"Nevertheless, I question them. In fact, I demand some changes."

The man was obviously angry, but he held his temper. "What changes do you wish?"

"You said that after I deliver the prints on Centaur - - -"

"And iron out any problems our scientists might encounter in building the rocket - - -"

"Yes, after that, you will send my wife and I to Venus and safety."

"Correct."

"I demand that upon delivery of the prints, you send Clare on

ahead."

"Why do you ask this?"

"Because the one thing I'm selling out my world for is her safety. I will gamble with it for only as short a time as necessary."

The man considered. What were the risks involved? Kendall might be sincere in his reason but if he were not, it would be easy enough to pick up Clare Kendall, unprotected as she would be in, some Venusian hotel.

"Granted," he said. Better to give in than to argue. Centaurian scientists could spot a major hoax on Kendall's part instantly, and Kendall was under great pressure. Resist at this moment and he might defy them, even with his wife's life at stake.

"You will proceed at once to Yellowstone." He gave Kendall careful instructions concerning the rendezvous and cut the connection.

Kendall sat for a long time staring at the blank screen - - - smoking endless cigarettes. After a while, he got wearily to his feet and looked at his watch. In seven hours and twenty-five minutes he would be on a Centaurian ship that would lift out of Terra's orbit and start bending space into time until . . .

greatened and darkened and Kendall was looking out across the huge rocket port from which the Centaurians planned to launch Terra's destruction.

Now, for the first time, he saw the Centaurian without the mask. The man was handsome. He had the cruel black eyes of all Centaurians. He smiled coldly. "We've come a long way, Kendall. I suppose you want to see your wife."

"No."

- That was a surprise. "I don't quite understand. Your feeling for her is - - -"

"Such that I wouldn't dare allow myself close to her or I wouldn't have the courage to let her go again."

"It's unnecessary that you do. We Centaurians keep our bargains."

"I've made my decision."

Kendall did watch Clare as they took her from the building to the Venus-bound rocket. His heart lifted at sight of her slim beauty, at the proud manner in which she carried herself, at the disdainful tilt of her head. Then she disappeared inside the rocket and he was again bleak and lonely.

He put himself at the disposal of the Centaurian scientists and discovered why Terra had stayed ahead for a century in the cold war. They were able, but stolid

THE PALE, green globe of Centaur hung in a black sky;

and methodical. They did not possess the unfettered imaginative force that made Terran scientists supreme.

Day by day the great lethal monster took form and Kendall's dread increased as the time of completion approached. Then the momentous morning arrived. Aside from asking technical questions and seeking guidance, the Centaurians left Kendall strictly alone; treated him with contempt all traitors are accorded even from those they help. Kendall did not seem to mind. In fact he preferred being alone.

Then one morning the Centaurian approached him. "The launching is today. Would you like to witness the death stroke? The gesture with which we slay your planet?"

Kendall shrugged. "It makes little difference."

"We will watch together from the tower . . ."

TWO JUNIOR scientists in Plant Nine were discussing Kendall's disappearance. "His leave was on the level. Signed by the Chief. Three days."

"Did he actually go to Yellowstone?"

"They're pretty sure he did. After that he vanished into thin air."

"Nobody vanishes into thin air." The junior scientist looked around and lowered his voice. "Do you think he defected?"

"I don't know. But I got the story pretty straight - - - that is, as much as the high brass knows."

"You did?"

"The day before he left, Kendall went to the file vaults to check the prints on *Willy Seven*."

"No!"

"Yes."

"Then the thing's pretty cut and dried. If he smuggled those prints out - - -" The young scientist was puzzled. "I don't understand."

"That's the strange part of it. Kendall didn't open that file. The time-stamp mechanism recorded no entry as of that date."

"Then what file did he open?"

"They can't be sure, but the Crackpot File *was* opened on that date."

"The Crackpot File! But no one is allowed in there! All those crazy dangerous ideas!"

"I know. And one set of prints appeared to have been disturbed."

"Photographed?"

"Perhaps. The rocket they labelled *Suicide One*. Professor Utterback's brain child. The one they figured could never be launched."

"I remember. The brass were pretty sure it would blow half the

North American continent away thirty seconds after the primer was ignited."

"Yes."

"They think Kendall photographed those prints?"

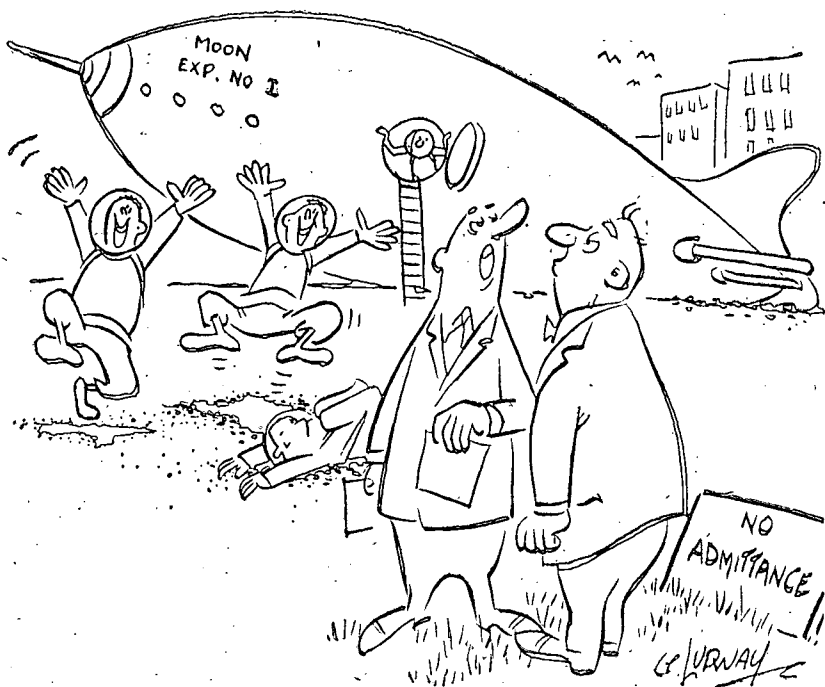
"They can't be sure, but with Centaur suddenly flaring into nova last week - - -"

"But that was pure coincidence.

It had to be. If Kendall had a plan to get that rocket into the Centaurian's hands, why did he keep it to himself. It would have been the making of the man! He would have been a hero."

"As I say, they have little to go on. Right now, they're trying to locate Kendall's wife. If they find her they might learn something."

THE END



"I told you this Moon trip would have a happy ending—the atomic motors won't work."

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66 NEXT STOP, NOWHERE! 99

by

Dick Purcell

**It's logical to assume that an elevator
only travels from one floor to another; yet if
you think about it — what's between the floors?**

Illustrated by W. E. Terry

FOUR PERSONS disappearing from an elevator should have caused concern — even excitement. Especially when the elevator was stuck between two floors. But the thing was handled quite casually. And with good reason. After all, when a thing is not understood the best defense against acknowledging ignorance is to insist that nothing extraordinary happened.

In this case, four persons, a girl and three men, stepped into an elevator in the Kendall Building. They were all headed for the same suite — offices occupied by several medical men. The elevator jammed between the sixth and seventh floors and refused to budge.

The operator, a salty little Brooklynite, swore quietly to himself and pushed the emergency sig-

nal. It rang but nothing happened. The operator waited for a few minutes, then spoke in a carefully casual voice, "The blessed engineer is out to supper. Now ain't that the way things always happen? When the blessed engineer goes out to supper the blessed elevator does a blessed sit-down between two floors."

"What — what are we going to do?" This from the very pretty female passenger named Peggy Wilson who was afraid of almost everything and was going to a psychiatrist who was trying to root a dominating mother out of the poor girl's subconscious and put the old lady back in her grave where she belonged.

"We aren't in any danger, miss. We could wait for the engineer but it might be quite a while."

"It looks to me as though we'll



have to wait for him," Walter Maltby said. Maltby was an ingrown little man who had had a toothache for three weeks and had finally been driven to the dentist by his dominating wife.

"Oh, no. If one of you guys — men — will boost me through the trap in the roof of the car, I can get to the seventh floor door. I'll crawl out and go down in the basement and move the blessed car to seven by hand."

"Okay," Wilmer Payton said. He was a six-foot-four Greek god with a body close to perfection and a handsome, intelligent face that was nothing more than a spate of false advertising pasted across the front of a vacant head. Wilmer was pretty much of a mental bankrupt. He didn't even own the furniture in his own cerebral attic, the pieces having been placed there by others. He had the look of a rising young executive and was the assistant mail room boy in a large publishing company. And a good one, too. Lately, they had been entrusting him with special delivery letters.

He braced himself and the operator climbed on his shoulders and vanished through the ceiling. A moment later there was a sound of an opening door and a few grunts and scramblings after which the door closed and silence again pre-

vailed.

The three passengers glanced at each other fearfully. The fourth, a small, white-haired man in his late sixties had stood quietly in one corner during the whole procedure. He had a pair of bright black eyes and a look reminding of an alert fox terrier in a basement known to house rats. He was Fleming Carter, a psychiatrist by profession and a student of almost everything by choice. He was an accomplished linguist among other things and translated Sanskrit and Hebrew for the pleasure of it. He was an amateur chemist and also conducted himself ably on a pair of skis.

So the quartette was not lacking in brilliance, Fleming Carter having enough to burnish all four.

He had mentally taken his three fellow-prisoners apart and put them together again when he noticed the girl's trembling and saw her first tears. Only then did he step forward.

"There is no cause for alarm, my dear — none at all. These lifts fairly bristle with safety devices. The insurance companies demand it."

Peggy Wilson turned to him gratefully; a little like a kitten, he thought, which yearned for the reassurance of a soothing hand. *She would make a beautiful Per-*

sian, he thought. A perfect house pet.

"But to be trapped here—like—like animals," Peggy whimpered. "It's terrible!" She was moving toward Fleming Carter's shoulder, but Wilmer Payton took a single step forward and her head turned quite naturally to *his* bosom. Fleming Carter smiled and estimated to a nicety the intelligence of any offspring that would result from a mating of these two vacuums.

"It's all right, baby," Wilmer said. "I'll take care of you."

Walter Maltby had troubles of his own. He now voiced them: "Jenny will be furious if we don't get out of here pretty quick. I'm always home for Television Theater and if I don't make it—"

He got no further because at that moment the foundations of the world seemed to give way and the four of them were hurled into a heap on the floor.

Or were they?

This question was in Fleming Carter's mind as Peggy Wilson screamed, Walter Maltby whimpered, and Wilmer Payton bellowed in terror. *Had* the lift fallen — the building collapsed — an atom bomb exploded? His instincts told him no. This because — while all the outward manifestations of such catastrophes seemed apparent, —

there was something strangely different about the sudden chaos into which the group had been thrown.

Fleming Carter felt they should all be dead. But they remained very much alive. They should have been at least mangled and maimed. None appeared even scratched.

All this, Carter told himself firmly, was a chaos of the mind and nothing more. It was mental panic of such violence that it was manifesting in the physical. He told himself this while he sought to maintain equilibrium while standing upon nothing and wondering where such a terrific wind could come from in a sheltered elevator shaft.

Then it was over. The hurricane subsided; the floor stiffened beneath them and they were lying in a heap—a heap made interesting by Peggy Wilson's legs sprawled above the others in a very unladylike manner.

Wilmer Payton groaned.

"Shut up," Fleming Carter said sharply. "Don't start a wave of panic and hysteria. You aren't hurt!"

"How the hell do you know I ain't?" Wilmer Payton demanded with childlike docility.

"Because I'm not and no one else seems to be and we all fell the same distance."

Fleming Carter began to extricate himself from the pack. This necessitated pressing rather personally against Peggy Wilson. He did what he had to do and then drew the girl's skirt down as gently and hastily as possible. He was relieved to find she was in no shape to care what anyone did with her skirt.

MEANWHILE, the elevator operator, upon finding he could not move the elevator returned to reassure the occupants. He went to the seventh floor and called down very cheerily, "Everything's all right, folks. If this'd happened before six o'clock there'd be plenty of blessed people around, but it's almost seven and the engineer ain't back from supper yet. It won't be but a little while though, and then—"

The operator became aware that only silence answered him. Had they been scared dumb? "You—hey you—down there—"

More silence. The operator frowned and crawled down into the shaft. He looked through the trap. Empty. "Well I'll be damned!" he said. And because an obvious situation was covered by an obvious answer, added, "All four of them crawled out and went home. Funny they couldn't stick around a few minutes."

He did not ponder the difficulties involved in such an escape. The only direction they could have gone was up and out on the seventh floor. He thus accepted the obvious. And his only thought on the subject was that he'd like to have been the one to boost the girl up.

Later, he bawled the engineer out and that was that so far as he was concerned.

But the situation was far less simple for the four passengers. As Fleming Carter struggled to his feet, Walter Maltby used his leg for a ladder and came erect also and said, "I'll bet Jenny will sue somebody for this! Jenny won't let them get away with it! Not for a minute."

Wilmer Payton was also on his feet looking dully about him. Fleming Carter said, "Why don't you help the lady, young man? I'm sure she would appreciate the courtesy from you more than myself or—?"

He looked questioningly at the other male member of the quartette.

"Walter Maltby—and as I was saying, Jenny will never—"

"I'm sure she won't."

"What happened?" Wilmer Payton asked of no one in particular as he hauled Peggy Wilson to her feet.

The girl was biting her lip, trying hard to be brave. "The elevator must have fallen. It's a wonder we weren't all killed!"

They agreed. All save Fleming Carter who was looking around with bright interest. "It seems to me that we are no longer in the elevator."

Walter Maltby's jaw dropped. "No longer in the —"

"This is a somewhat larger area. And I fail to see any walls. Also, the ceiling seems to have vanished."

The other three gazed about in shocked silence and the truth of Fleming Carter's statements dawned on them. No walls, no ceiling. Nothing but hard earth under their feet and a high blue sky above.

"Why we're out — out in the country!" Peggy Wilson babbled.

"I agree," Fleming Carter said. "But let's not get panicky. We are still alive and unhurt."

"But I don't understand it." Walter Maltby said, plaintively. "I just don't understand it."

Fleming Carter regarded the little man with pity. No Jenny around to reassure the little man with her domineering bulk. Carter knew as a matter of course that Jenny would be both bulky and domineering.

Carter looked about him. They

were out in open country — that was obvious. There was a huge sun and a huge blue sky and huge clouds floating overhead. Everything in place but something very wrong.

Things were just too big.

That was it, Carter told himself. The size of this new world was far out of proportion to the size of him and his new friends. They were all standing in coarse grass that reached their knees—high grass—but Carter realized instantly that the grass was not high. They themselves were short!

WILMER PAYTON, holding Peggy Wilson in the crook of one arm, looked about through eyes that obviously sent no intelligent messages to his brain. He turned them on Carter and said, "I don't get any of this."

"I think I know what happened," Carter said.

This even caught the interest of Walter Maltby who was wondering what Jenny would have to say about his not arriving home on schedule. "What *did* happen?"

"We've fallen — or were snatched — through some sort of a space-time warp."

Wilmer Payton gaped idiotically and said, "We did *which* through a *what*?"

Fleming Carter seemed not to

hear. He was staring pensively at the thick blades of grass that brushed his knees. "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio—" he mused.

"There ain't nobody here named Horatio," Wilmer said sullenly.

"Excuse me. My mind was wandering," Carter's mind was not wandering at all, however. He said, "There are certain unexplained phenomena that are believed to have happened in our world. People have been known to disappear mysteriously and those who remain behind formulate theories as to the how and the why of their vanishing. It is believed by some that people can be moved, under certain conditions from one plane of existence to another — that there are many of these so-called planes of existence where many and varied peoples live and breathe upon them.

"Of course, no proof has ever been found for these theories because the vanished persons never came back to testify, but—" Carter stopped suddenly and regarded the three with a touch of compassion. "You haven't the least idea what I'm talking about, do you?"

"I'm afraid not," Walter Maltby said timidly.

"Well, never mind. Perhaps I don't either. In any case, exis-

tence is its own excuse for accepting any locale. Suffice it to say we are now in a world that was not built for us — a world for creatures of far greater dimensions than ourselves — and how we got here is really of little importance."

Peggy Wilson was now snugly in Wilmer Payton's arms, her head tight against his chest. Wilmer was just opening his mouth to say something when, over the slope of the land, a huge form appeared. There was nothing mystifying about it. The creature was obviously a man. He wore rather strange loose clothing that, Carter thought, had some resemblance to those of the ancient Greeks. But otherwise there was nothing different about him except his size. As he approached, Fleming Carter estimated that Wilmer Payton — the tallest of the four — would about come to the top of his odd sandal-like footwear.

There was no panic now — the three being completely frozen with terror and Carter statue-quiet and sharply alert. The giant, he was sure, would pass within two hundred yards of them. A distance dangerously close considering the man's size.

Still, Carter was optimistic. There was no reason why the giant should see them. As things

were, they could certainly hope to be overlooked.

But Peggy Wilson dashed this hope as the pressure within her became too strong to contain and broke out in the form of a scream.

The giant stopped, took a few quick steps in their direction and was upon them. Carter knew then, that they were lost. A huge hand swooped down and lifted Walter Maltby into the air. Far above, Carter saw the terrified Maltby being transferred carefully to the giant's other hand. Now Wilmer Payton and Peggy Wilson were running blindly in two directions, Peggy having been suddenly deserted by her protector. Twice more the huge hand descended and the two also vanished into the vast palm.

Apparently, the giant overlooked Fleming Carter who had stood quite still during the whole time. But Carter made a swift decision based more on charity than good sense. Somehow, he could not leave those three to their fate. So he cried out and waved his arms. "Just a moment! You overlooked me!"

The hand swooped down again as the giant saw him.

CARTER FLEMING found himself resting comfortably with his face against someone's

back. Otherwise he was completely surrounded by soft flesh. He realized they were being handled carefully however so he felt that death, while definitely a threat had been at least postponed. He wondered about the others, so close to him and yet so far away so far as contact was concerned. He knew the terror that raced through their minds and he pitied them . . .

The giant was continuing on, Carter decided, and he endured the ride as best he could.

Then it terminated suddenly as Carter and the others were very gently tumbled into a room. The room had no ceiling but this situation was speedily remedied when a ceiling was lowered and set into place above them. In the resulting darkness, Carter heard Peggy Wilson sobbing and various unintelligible noises from Maltby and Payton. Then the room began suddenly to move in haphazard directions.

Possibly this was finally the end, but Fleming Carter could not bring himself to think so. Because even though the room pitched and tossed, Carter felt it was being done rather gently by the giant hands.

Then it was over. The room settled down and remained on solid base. Immediately there was a rending sound and a vast finger

was thrust through the wall just below ceiling level. The finger was withdrawn but only to reappear when thrust through the other side.

It vanished again and the two resulting holes let in ample air and light.

For a few moments Carter and the other three sat motionless, waiting. Something was going on outside the room — the room itself moving slightly — but the violent tossing was evidently over.

Peggy Wilson spoke first — or rather, sobbed. "Where are we?"

"I'm sure I don't know, my dear, but if I stood on the young man's shoulders I could look out through one of those openings and perhaps learn a little something."

"You want me to lift you?" Wilmer Payton said dully.

"That is the general idea," Carter replied in a gentle voice.

Wilmer braced himself against the wall and Carter clambered to his shoulders and cautiously pushed his head through the opening. He remained thus for quite a while — until Wilmer Payton began moving restlessly. Then he clambered down.

They waited for him to speak but he said nothing. He stared at the hole with a look of amazement upon his face as though, for the first time the wonder of this

strange transition had struck him forcibly. Then he turned his eyes upon his three companions and there was a look in his eyes that had not been there before; personal, yet impersonally analytical. A hard look to read, so they could have no way of knowing that he was trying to forecast how they would react to the fate that awaited them.

"Well," Wilmer Payton demanded impatiently. "Did you see anything?"

"Yes. This is not a room. It is a huge box of some sort. It is bound around on all sides by what looks like red carpeting of a width used in hallways. I believe such carpetings are called runners. Attached to the top is a large white sail although it appears to be made of paper rather than canvas." He was watching them closely as he spoke.

"It took you all that time to see those things?" Walter Maltby asked a trifle plaintively.

"No. There were other things."

At this point Peggy Wilson, coming out of her shock, began to cry hysterically. "My God! What's to become of us? We'll all be killed — murdered!"

"I don't think so," Carter said.

"Then we'll be held prisoner. That will be just as bad!"

"In a sense, you will be held

prisoner — but I don't think it will be bad. I think our jailer will probably be a rather kindly person who will give us every consideration."

"How could a jailer do that?" Peggy Wilson moaned.

CARTER laid a hand upon her shoulder. "Consider, my dear. All your life you have needed a mother. Now you will have the equivalent of one." He turned to Walter Maltby. "And you. You have learned to function only as a result of a dominating wife's promptings. Our jailer will fill that role for you."

Lastly he regarded Wilmer Payton. "You, young man will be directed and guided. You will not have need of the brain power with which you are not equipped.

"All of you will be content. None will have any decisions to make—all will be taken care of. Can you think of a more pleasant destiny?"

Walter Maltby said, "You're talking in circles. Talking but not saying anything!"

Carter had turned away, smiling. "This is very strange. We were transported to another plane, but

not snatched up willy-nilly. There was a pattern behind it. Three people admirably suited to their new fate."

Wilmer Payton seized Fleming Carter by the arm and whirled him around. "Will you please tell us what you're talking about?"

"Of course," Carter said quietly. "To speak the absolute truth, we are in a box. The box is tied with a wide red ribbon. The thing I called a sail is in reality a greeting card upon which certain words are written; words not too difficult to decipher."

"Well, go on — what are the words?"

"In English, they would read — 'Happy Birthday, Darling.' You are someone's birthday present."

Peggy's face was ashen. "You speak of *us*," she whispered. "How well suited *we* are for this fate. What about yourself?"

Carter smiled. "I expect this to be the most interesting period of my life," he said. "You see, the present is for me. I picked it out."

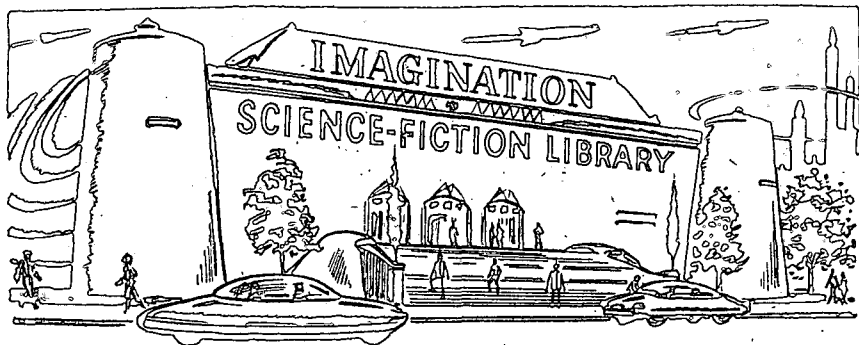
And as they watched in stunned amazement, Carter began to grow.

THE END

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IMAGINATIVE TALES

JULY ISSUE ON SALE FEATURING "THUNDER WORLD" by EDMOND HAMILTON



— REVIEWING CURRENT SCIENCE FICTION BOOKS —

Conducted by Henry Bott

Hard cover science fiction is booming and many fine novels and anthologies are available at all bookstores or by writing direct to the publishers. Each month IMAGINATION will review one or more — candidly — as a guide to your book purchases.

DOUBLE STAR

by Robert A. Heinlein, \$2.95, 186 pages, Doubleday & Company, Garden City, New York, 1956.

Lorenzo Smythe; itinerant actor, temporarily down on his luck, is asked to assume the role of a master politician, Bonforte, leader of the Expansionist Group which wishes to bring the varied peoples of the System under one equal democratic government. Within that simple framework, Heinlein has erected another of his minor masterpieces.

The characterization of Lorenzo is magnificent; you feel as if an actor is talking, you smell the paint, and the frequent allusions to the classical repertory of the theater come naturally.

The first third of the book is

simply fascinating. Heinlein constructs a mythos that is so real, so cleverly contrived in every respect that you are completely absorbed.

Unfortunately, the story rapidly declines in intensity and interest; other characters are sketchily drawn and the air of excitement diminishes.

But as with all Heinlein stories, this is so far above the average s-f novel that you can't afford to miss it. In fact, for the picture of Lorenzo, the book alone is well worth its price.

On reflection, I have the feeling that this is a long novel intended for magazine appearance, which was then changed to book form by hasty addition. But it's still a bargain.

THE CITY AND THE STARS

by Arthur C. Clarke, \$3.75, 310 pages, Harcourt, Brace and Company, New York, N. Y.

It is a fortunate thing that Arthur C. Clarke uses the English language so felicitously. After "Sands of Mars" and "Prelude to Space", this is a terrible disappointment, saved only by some inevitable poetic grace that threads all of Clarke's work.

The reasons for his earlier excellence are not hard to find. In addition to being so soundly qualified technically, he makes his characters come alive. But we don't care much what happens to the people who inhabit "Diasphar" the

gigantic womb that is the city of a dead Earth.

The hero, imbued with a will his fellows lack, undertakes to leave the euphoric Diasphar - - and comes upon another culture, which does not prevent him from attempting to undertake the new journey to the stars. It's all very dull and boring, except as I said, there are beautiful stretches of writing, there are enchanting technological conceptions. But we expect these things, automatically from Clarke.

I dislike being critical of so competent a writer as Clarke, but I must turn thumbs down on his book.

STAR GUARD

by Andre Norton, 247 pages, \$3.00, Harcourt, Brace and Company, New York 17, N. Y.

If you have read and enjoyed "Star Man's Son" and "Star Ranger"—you'll enjoy this fast-moving adventure story. Good writing, a-cut-above-average characterization, exciting situations. This is the world of 3956 A.D., and in it a band of mercenaries from the Earth fight throughout the Universe, as the author puts it, "to keep the peace." And to add to the excitement the book is full of personal combat with the sword.

So much for the facts. If this kind of thing is your dish of tea, go ahead and enjoy it. If I may intrude my personal opinion, I think it a vast nothing. Edgar Rice Burroughs did the same thing on

a much smaller canvas—and more effectively. And so did a host of other imitators. A capsule description of this might be "Burroughs with a tinge of science."

I think there is a great deal of difference between what is called science fiction and what is called the "fairy tale." I think also that too many things in the latter category are being called the former. I would like to preserve the distinction and not blend the two classifications into an amorphous goo. To illustrate; Heinlein's work is science-fiction, Clarke's work is science fiction and there are many others. But there are more of the fairy tale kind—I do wish they would be so labeled. This fairy tale kind, I might add, does not have the saving grace of whimsy.

Letters

from the

Readers

BUM NOVEL?

Dear wlh:

Notice that you've got Bob Bloch to write the fanzine column each issue now. Best deal you ever made! I may subscribe again if you'll increase the length of his column and let Bloch rage rampant with his wit and humor. Fandom needs more humor—and so does science fiction!

The use of second color on inside illos really improves the appearance of *Madge*. By all means keep it up—increase the use of color.

Fiction in the April issue was terrible. PRISON OF A BILLION YEARS was fairly good, but only because of the idea it presented. As far as the lead novel is concerned, LEGION OF LAZARUS smelled. The opening of the yarn on the cover was the only good part of the story. Too bad Hamilton didn't continue in that vein!

Claude Ray Hall
2214 San Antonio

Austin 5, Texas

Bloch has free rein with FAN-DORA'S BOX so you'll see plenty of wit running rampant . . . as to the LAZARUS novel, see other letters in the column. . . . wlh

NOT SO BUM NOVEL!

Dear Ed:

Although I have been a science fiction fan for several years now, I have never formally expressed an opinion of any s-f magazine.

However, I was so fascinated by THE LEGION OF LAZARUS in the April issue of *Madge* that I felt called upon to join my praises with the others which are undoubtedly pouring in.

I also approve of the cover for April. Keep it up!

May Reed

9517-106A Ave.

Edmonton, Alta., Canada

And pour in they did, May. With one or two exceptions, such as Claude, above. More Hamilton on the way wlh

STEADY IMPROVEMENT

Dear Bill Hamling:

The April issue of *Madge* is one of the best issues of a science fiction magazine I've read in some time. *Madge* is showing steady improvement!

Best in the issue was THE LEGION OF LAZARUS. I think this is the best novel you've published since HIGHWAYS IN HIDING (March thru June of '55 serial). The plot was excellent—and for that matter everything about it was excellent!

A close runner-up was PRISON OF A BILLION YEARS. Just wish it could have been a longer story!

Oh, yes, the cover was wonderful. It reminded me of the "good old days."

Marty Fleischman
1247 Grant Ave.
Bronx 56, N. Y.

Glad you liked LEGION so well, Marty. As to the cover, we too thought it good. But another opinion follows wh

THAT "NUDE" COVER!

Dear Bill:

What's with the cover on the April *Madge*? Nude, or nearly nude women are one thing—but now you are starting on the men! People are beginning to wonder what sort of literature I read . . . Also, I don't like the idea of putting the opening of the story on the cover. (But lest you think I dislike all *Madge* covers let me say I thought the February issue was just fine.)

THE GRAVEYARD OF SPACE was vaguely disappointing, al-

though the illo was interesting. Come to think of it you have had all too few McCauley illos lately. And too many by Terry. Terry is all right with inanimate objects, but when he gets to living creatures—especially guys and gals—he doesn't have it.

I also see you've been putting artist credits on the illos; stop it! You are ruining our monthly guessing game of who drew what and where. In case I didn't mention it, a copy of *Madge* purchased from the newsstand passes through at least fifteen different people before it finally rests in the limbo of my files; battered and bloody, but not beaten! This game of ours furnishes many hours of heated argument and at least three good fights. You are spoiling it. Cease and desist!

LEGION OF LAZARUS was good, as was BEASTS IN THE VOID. Keep up the good work and all that.

Janice Jacobson
2430 Garth Ave.
Los Angeles 34, Cal.

We wouldn't dream of stopping the mayhem—but we can't help wondering why doesn't every one of the fifteen contestants buy a copy? We like the big readership—but we like to make money too! So cease and desist on this one copy loanout and do battle over fifteen copies at least! wh

LONESOME DOWN IN TEXAS?

Dear Bill:

The cover of the April issue of *Madge* stunk to high space! And to think that I used to believe that *Madge* had some of the best covers in the business! Smith could have

at least had the intelligence to have had the fatto bottomo a woman's!— And I also object to having a section of the lead novel crowding out a goodly portion of the cover painting. So don't do it again!

But I actually didn't write this letter just for the above comment. The cold fact is I want stf pen pals. Anybody interested in science fiction, people, or just plain bugs, I'll correspond with. It gets mighty lonesome down here in Texas!

Kenneth Tidwell
2708 Lamesa Dr.
Austin 4, Texas

Take note of brother Hall's address earlier in the column and you won't be so lonesome! wlv

COVER CAUGHT HER!

Dear Mr. Hamling:

Read *Madge* for the first time with the April issue. It was like this:

I was on my coffee break when I saw that eye-catching cover painting by Malcolm Smith. Naturally I wonder why that frightened-looking naked man had been cast out into space from that rocket ship, and even more, I wondered what would happen to him afterward! So, I read the copy alongside the picture which was the beginning to *LEGION OF LAZARUS*. I became so interested I almost forgot to go back to work.

Of course, I bought the magazine to finish the story—and everything else in the issue. Next to *LEGION*, I liked best Dick Purcell's *MR. CHIPFELLOW'S JACKPOT*. This was an entirely different type of story, but it had a punch to it—that ironic humor that makes a

reader smile mentally, or perhaps chuckle to himself and say, "Well I'll be darned!"

I'll be looking forward to the June issue and don't be surprised if I turn into one of your steady readers!

Hazel M. Scott
1336 Lucile Ave.
Los Angeles 26, Cal.

We won't be surprised, Hazel, and believe us, nothing will please us more! Welcome into the fold . . . wlv

SPACE OPERA CHARACTERS

Dear Bill:

I just got the April issue of *Madge* today so haven't read the stories yet. But the first thing I did, as always, was turn to the letter section. (Long live this most characteristic and interesting part of a science fiction magazine!)

Reading Gwen Cunningham's letter and your response, prompted me to take time out from work (the chief isn't looking) and send you my two-bits worth on the subject.

You will remember the discussion concerned the adult, mature brand of stf versus the adventure, space opera stuff. It's the old argument, I know, but please bear with me for a minute. I would like to quote two words from Gwen's letter. They are: "ignoring characterization." The word "characterization" is the important thing as I see it.

It is my contention that adventure stf can be just as boring as adult stf, and vice versa, if they lack *true to life characters*. The thrill of reading a Thomas B. Costain, or a Frank Yerbe novel (in the historical adventure field) is watching their characters, their people,

springing vividly to life. You leave one of these novels with the distinct feeling that you have met and shared adventures with during a segment of their lives, real people. In comparison, stf characters generally are little more than lifeless paper dolls with about as much depth of character. So at present, lacking this vital ingredient to storytelling, stf stories depend upon their (a) adventure, or (b) sociological problems to get them across.

If, however, the time ever comes when some bright young author begins creating Scarlet O'Hara or Rhett Butler characters in stf stories, regardless of whether they are adventure or adult types, then I predict stf will blossom forth to undreamed of heights.

Larry G. Slapak
4080 W. 10th Ave.
Vancouver, B.C., Canada

We believe you're being a bit harsh by inferring that all stf stories lack what you term good characterization. We do agree with you that characterization is very important in any story; but we feel the crux of the matter lies in the "type" of story as to whether stf will continue to blossom in readership. It's no secret that the historical novel is a perennial favorite of the reading public; it is also no secret that the historical novel offers as its major ingredient, adventure. This is what we maintain stf needs. Plenty of good solid adventure to whisk us away to other planets, galaxies, through time warps, etc. A story which takes us on a grand adventure is a story that entertains. And entertainment is what keeps us coming back for more. That's what the stories in IMAGINATION, and our

companion science fiction magazine, IMAGINATIVE TALES are supposed to offer: adventure and entertainment. The fact that both of our magazines continue to rise in popularity is proof enough to us that most readers prefer entertainment to the "educational" efforts fostered by the ivory-tower group in stf. We're followers of science fiction because of the fun we get out of it! And following characters on adventures into the future is our idea of a lot of fun! We know all of you are enjoying it as much as we are. On to further adventure!

. wh

SPEECHLESS NOVEL...

Dear wh:

LEGION OF LAZARUS was, well, wonderful! Yet "wonderful" seems a pretty weak word to describe the story. I can't say that I have ever read a better one. Nothing ever printed in a science fiction magazine has done quite what LEGION did with me. All I can say is I wish Hollywood would make it into a movie—not changing a single word or character. It left me speechless for its beauty of word and character of plot.

If all science fiction was like this I don't think the whole country could be kept away from the s-f rack at the newsstands. Please make all stories in Madge as good as the Hamilton novel in the April issue.

Kitty Doyle
117 Eighth St.
Monessen, Pa.

Ed Hamilton has a new novel coming up soon in Madge, Kitty. And there'll be more to follow! . . wh

CONSIDER US BLASTED!

Dear Bill:

Lincoln once asked a lawyer: "If you call legs tails, how many tails does a dog have?"

"Five," the lawyer replied.

"One," said Lincoln. "Calling legs tails does not make legs tails."

The same applies to IMAGINATION. No matter how many letters you dredge up from the mailbox saying IMAGINATION is tops, great, wonderful—it isn't.

I place *Madge* close to the bottom among the stf mags.

Madge has fine cartoons, a fair-fan review column, poor book reviews, poorer letters, poorer stories, and last but not least the editorial.

That letter column! Remember the letters in STARTLING STORIES and THRILLING WONDER STORIES? They would tear the magazine to bits. Those stories they blasted were classics written by Bradbury, Clarke, Sturgeon, and DeCamp, plus the rest of the top writers. The covers they hated and they had a personal grudge against the editor.

You should live so long as to have their fine writers, illustrators, and letter columns. Take heed; you benefit from criticism not undeserved praise. Soothe your ego by trying to make *Madge* deserve the praise in your letter column, instead of trying to get more undeserved praise.

I buy IMAGINATION for the cartoons and the few stories that are good that somehow slip past your rejection stamp. Your eyes are improving because in the last few issues not one good story managed to slip by you!

Since 35c is too much for good cartoons, kiss this customer goodbye.

John Fox

39-19 29th St.

New York 6, N. Y.

You build quite a case using STARTLING STORIES and THRILLING WONDER STORIES as examples. So their letter columns were loaded with criticism of everything in the magazine? Perhaps that's the reason those magazines are no longer published . . . huh? For your information we don't dredge for letters of praise—but we do dredge for letters such as yours, simply because we don't get many. And we hope we never do! You don't like IMAGINATION, and that's your privilege. But don't get the idea you represent the majority. Quite the contrary. We're sorry to lose you as a reader, but as in most things, majority rules, and we wouldn't think of changing MADGE in any way to satisfy the whims of a few. Good hunting to you, Mr. Fox. When you get tired of running alone come back to our Space Lodge. The door's open.

. *wlh*

ONE NICE GRIPE

Dear Bill:

Just finished reading the April issue of *Madge*. It was the best in quite some time. LEGION OF LAZARUS held my interest to the end—I like my stories that way!

I have only one gripe to send your way: MADGE should be a monthly!

David Raley

2705 S. 11th St.

Gadsden, Ala.

We do have a monthly science fiction magazine, Dave. IMAGINATION appears one month, and IMAGINATIVE TALES the following. Same good brand of stf and features in both books . . . wth

BOYS AND A BUG'S EAR

Dear Bill:

I think that after five years of being a fan I should have my say about science fiction.

I am 18 years old and next to boys, science fiction is my meat!

My favorite magazine, of course, is *Madge*. There is no comparison with other books in the field. Believe me, *Madge* is tops.

But to sound-off just one little bit—get rid of FANDORA'S BOX. It doesn't strike a bell. But continue those cartoons — they're as cute as a bug's ear. And your stories are always good. Keep up the good work.

Barbara Kleinberger

88-37 181st St.

Hollis, L. I., N. Y.

We'll bet you're as cute as a bug's ear too, Babs. And don't wait for another five years before dropping us a line . . . Which winds up shop for this month, gang. Why don't YOU turn the page and send in your subscription. It's another good way of letting us know how well you like MADGE . . . wth

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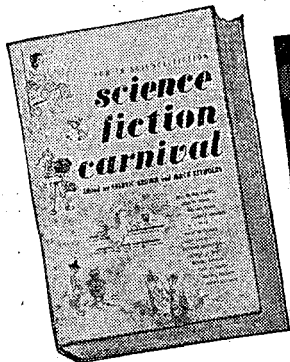
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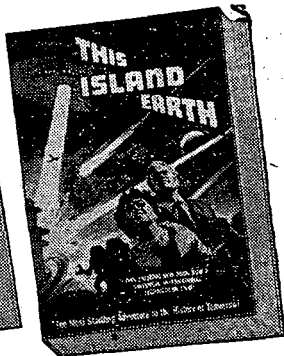
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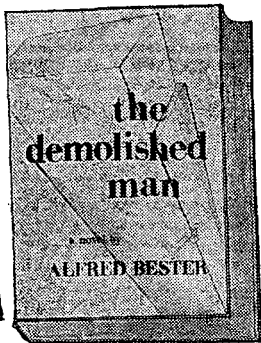
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